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DOES ANYONE KNOW LORD BYRON?

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Interdisciplinary Studies

by
Dianne Marie Waylett


September 1998


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8-10-98
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ABSTRACT

Lord Byron's seductive personality has enthralled, titillated, and mesmerized his followers, past and present, with a power unequalled and unattained by other celebrity poets. With equal power he has shocked, estranged, angered, and enraged his antagonists. He has been loved and adored as a heroic champion of the oppressed masses, and shunned as an evil genius. His extremes of temperament have earned him the label manic depressive--a catch-all disorder that has become an abyss into which current researchers have systematically thrust scores of the world's best-known, exceptionally creative minds. But is this alleged clinical diagnosis well-founded, or a simplistic answer to some very difficult questions? Can modern day psychological evaluation devices produce a valid, posthumous diagnosis across generations? A closer look at Byron's complete history, as told through his own rhetoric, and that of his biographers, may produce a more accurate diagnosis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe many thanks to many people. First and foremost is my husband, Barry, who has given an incalculable number of hours toward the reading and editing of my many drafts. Thank you to John and Cheré Negaard for accompanying Barry and me on our Byronic pilgrimage, with a special thanks to Cheré for the procurement of books I would otherwise not have had access to. Thank you to John, Chris, Marlene, Christopher, Cassie and my mother, for aiding me in my research, and another thanks to my mother for providing all the note paper. A thank you is also in order to my late father, who instilled in me a love of words.

DEDICATION

To Barry, who made it all possible.

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CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO LORD BYRON

At the age of 13, upon entering Harrow School, Lord Byron wrote these words to his mother:

"I am equal, if not superior to most of my school-fellows, and if my fortune is narrow it is my misfortune, not my fault. But, however, the way to riches, to greatness lies before me. I can, I will cut myself a path through the world or perish in the attempt.... I will carve myself a passage to Grandeur, but never with Dishonor. These, Madam, are my intentions."¹

The old adage, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions," never applied to any individual's career, so much as it does to Lord Byron's. He carved that passage of which he wrote; most unfortunately, he did not escape the dishonor he intended to avoid.

As a result of that dishonor, he became both famous and infamous. To those who loved him, he was the Byronic Hero incarnate. To those who hated him, he was an evil genius—a fiend—even Satan himself. To be sure, there was no mid ground when taking a position to like or dislike Lord Byron; he aroused deeply passionate responses of the most extreme kind.

Many of the negative reactions were due, in part, to his failure to uphold the moral standards of the age. (He had an incestuous relationship with his half-sister, and there is evidence that he may have fathered some of her

children.) Also, he displayed a boundless sexual appetite, which he shared with countless women—from prostitutes to nobility, and a few men, as well.

But it was not just Byron's lack of moral fiber that enraged jolly old England's citizenry; they were also greatly disturbed by his complex and paradoxical personality that could, in rapid succession, exhibit itself along any point of a behavioral continuum ranging from kind and compassionate to wildly explosive—leaving those in his presence frightened, shocked, mystified, and stunned. It is just this enigmatic behavior that has compelled many of Byron's biographers—his contemporaries and all who followed (friend and foe), to attempt to explain his nature.

TO KNOW HIM IS NOT TO KNOW HIM

It is believed by many Byron scholars, that his personality defies analysis. Byron authority Peter Quennell states that:

There is no other great man who appears at first sight to reveal himself more readily; his character, if we study him closely enough and follow him hard enough, often seems, as our knowledge increases, to be among the most elusive. We possess a vast quantity of information about his habits, tastes and antecedents; and yet, it may presently strike us, some essential clues are lacking.²

Nonetheless, troops of biographers, from Byron's time to the present, have continued to participate in the futile attempt to demystify his lordship.

In recent years, respected theorists in the fields of psychiatry, psychology, and sociology have touted the results of their various forms of research, in their quests to make posthumous personality evaluations. Most of their respective theories were attempts to prove that there exists a link between the artistic personality, and madness—most especially bipolar (manic-depressive) disorder. So far, no theory has surfaced that explains conclusively the elusive personality of Lord Byron.

While reviewing the most publicized research (much of it highly acclaimed), I was taken aback by the obvious lack of both validity and reliability, the two essential factors that must be present in any research, if it is to possess even an atom of truth. Perhaps it is those missing factors that have allowed Byron to remain an anomaly for almost two hundred years. After all, how does one perform a personality assessment on someone who has been dead for centuries? So far, to my mind, no one has adequately answered that question. What has happened to date is that careless research has resulted in Byron (along with a multitude of society's creative geniuses) being labeled Bipolar.

DIAGNOSING DEAD PEOPLE: CURRENT RESEARCH/CURRENT FLAWS

There are many proponents of the Bipolar theory, leading among them is Johns-Hopkins psychologist, Kay Redford Jamison, who, in an attempt to link madness and creativity, gathered 197 of history's most creative minds and performed

what could be construed as "group diagnosis," dumping the entire menagerie into a common "bipolar grave." Because she is viewed as one of the leading authorities on bipolar disorder—and because many other theorists believe this disorder is what runs the mental machinery of creative people—I will focus on her work, and its inaccuracies.

Jo Ann C. Gutin (anthropologist, science writer, and winner of the 1995 National Book Critics Circle Award for criticism) reiterates the importance with which Jamison's research has been viewed, when she points out the fact that "[Jamison's] many books and articles on the subject have made her the defacto point person for the art-and-madness link."³ In my research on bipolar disorder, Jamison's name has come up any number of times as the leading authority. Jamison states that she, herself, is bipolar, and infers that this gives her some kind of diagnostic advantage. After reading her book, and assessing her point of view, I am inclined to disagree with her. Gutin has made some very astute observations, where Jamison's diagnosis is concerned.

According to Gutin, Jamison has "compiled a role call of the artists in this unhappy club that reads like the A-list for the cocktail party of the millennium."⁴ In perusing Jamison's roll of disordered celebrities, I found Gutin's appraisal to be absolutely correct; the list indeed looks like the Who's Who of History: Lord Byron, Charles Baudelaire, William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Samuel

Taylor Coleridge, Hart Crane, John Keats, Emily Dickinson, Hans Christian Anderson, Honoré de Balzac, William James, Leo Tolstoy, to name a few. Jamison recruited her army of deceased bipolars across centuries and professions, which no doubt contributed to her control and sampling problems, resulting in an obvious lack of validity and reliability.

Jamison's list of artists is divided into five categories. In all, there are sixty-two poets (she focuses on Byron), sixty-two writers, twenty-three classical composers, seven non classical composers and musicians, and forty-one artists, making a grand total of 195 creative individuals.⁵ Jamison focuses on artists who committed suicide, attempted to commit suicide, or spent time in asylums or psychiatric hospitals. Also, every one of the 195 personalities in her study is deceased.

In attempting to fit all of these eccentric people into her bipolar parameters, it appears that Jamison made some fatal research errors. I was particularly bothered by the fact that she has hand-selected 195 well-known creative people across centuries, with no mention of controls for validity. I had hoped to find a way to determine what percentage of artists experience bipolar disorder, but ran into problem after problem. How do you provide a control group for such a study? Is the entire world's population the control group, or just creative members of society? How do you get the figures for this research? After all,

bipolar disorder affects only one percent of the general population. If that percentage is higher in creative people, how do you go about proving it? Because of complicated questions such as these, my attempts to sift through history, locate all the creative geniuses, and gather the proper numerical figures, were quite futile. Perhaps the most perplexing question was, how could Jamison be so sure of her diagnoses? Her research was quite exclusionary; for instance, it did not extend to creative people in the far east or in Latin American countries. If Bipolar disorder is linked to creativity, should it not be universal? Jamison states that her reason for including only Americans, British, Europeans, Irish, and Russians is that her list is "meant to be an illustrative rather than a comprehensive list."⁶ My fear is that "illustrative" examples have a way of detracting from validity.

I was concerned also as to why artists from other creative occupations were not included. The movie and the rock music industries have certainly had their share of creative, suicidal people—some who were quite successful in their suicide attempts (Marilyn Monroe, Jimmy Hendrix, Janis Joplin, to name a few). Taking these other creative fields into consideration compounds the research problems. So the ultimate question seems to be, could anyone extract the necessary information, from past and recent history, and turn this into a meaningful study? Implications are that

there is just too much unattainable information spread out over centuries, for anyone to make sense of a study of this magnitude. However, Jamison is not alone in the research tactic of grouping artistic individuals. It seems that most current assessors of dead celebrities are also working toward trying to prove the creativity and madness link.

Nancy Andreasen, while doing her residency in psychiatry at the University of Iowa, attempted to show a relationship between schizophrenia and creativity, using living populations. She was surprised when she discovered what she presumed to be an obvious bipolar connection.⁷ Harvard psychiatrist Albert Rothenberg took issue with the findings. In general, he objected to her control group:

Which he says was not really comparable with the group of creative people, and points out that Andreasen herself did the interviews and made the diagnoses, with none of the customary cross-checking to ensure objectivity. Rothenberg himself has spent 30 years interviewing eminent creative people Nobel and Pulitzer prize winners among them and is convinced that creativity is facilitated by mental health, not illness.⁸

As ludicrous as it may sound, even researchers in the field of neuroscience have become involved in the issue, and have taken what could be considered the first step toward "putting a poet in a brain scanner."⁹ Dr. Michael Posner and his coworkers at the University of Oregon have been using functional neuroimaging technologies in an attempt to understand what goes on in the brains of mood disordered

patients¹⁰. This research has concerned itself mainly with the depressive end of the spectrum, but for a purely practical reason:

Mania involves physical as well as mental restlessness. Someone in the middle of a manic episode is incapable of staying still long enough for a brain scan. Yet neuroscientists studying language in the brain have noticed a pattern that may help explain at least one element of bipolar creativity: verbal fluency.¹¹

Also stuck in the bipolar rut is biographical researcher Arnold Ludwig, another believer in the madness/creativity connection. Ludwig demonstrates clearly the uncertain nature of alleged cause and effect correlation. Ludwig's study is the largest done to date, and according to Gutin, "the subtitle of Arnold Ludwig's book *The Price of Greatness*, says it all: *Resolving the Creativity and Madness Controversy*."¹²

As you can no doubt discern, Ludwig believes he has discovered the real truth about the creativity and madness connection:

For a decade Ludwig and his research associates have been sifting through upwards of 2,200 biographies of 1,004 eminent men and women in an effort to learn what factors combine to produce the kind of high-order creativity that makes historians sit up and take notice.¹³

In comparing Ludwig's study to Andreasen's and Jamison's, Gutin points out that she believes that he has achieved a higher level of accuracy as a result of using

secondary sources. By this she means that Ludwig has avoided some of the sampling problems for which Jamison and Andreasen were criticized. Other researchers have objected to the biographical approach, contending that such studies contain biases of their own.¹⁴ Ludwig has responded by saying:

'On the whole, I think biographers—who spend years getting to know their subjects will have a better perspective than a clinician asking standardized questions or administering a questionnaire, which has built-in theoretical or diagnostic assumptions,' he says. 'After all, what you get in a clinical interview is autobiography, and that's the most inaccurate record of all.'¹⁵

This blanket statement, regarding the lack of truth in autobiography, as it turns out, is dependent on the individual. In Byron's case, he was truthful to that proverbial fault, as will be shown.

THE MISSING PSYCHOLOGICAL LINK

In reviewing the various methods researchers have employed in their attempts to evaluate long-dead personalities, it was not just the lack of validity and reliability that troubled me, but also the failure of those researchers to first search for catastrophic (or even just stressful) events that might be responsible for the extreme behaviors exhibited by these alleged deranged artists. If no such life shattering events were obvious, that would at least eliminate some other possible causes. To simply look at the full-blown symptomology displayed by a creative adult, seems

very short-sighted. (To look at childhood symptoms, without looking for causes is equally short-sighted.) Medical and psychological journals overflow with studies that support my hypothesis.

For instance, The Journal of the American Medical Association published a cross sectional study of 1,931 women on the Clinical Characteristics of Women With a History of Childhood Abuse. The outcomes being measured were: prevalence of physical and sexual abuse, physical symptoms, psychological symptoms, and street drug use. In short, the conclusions were: "Physical or sexual abuse is associated with adult health problems including physical symptoms, psychological problems, and substance abuse; for many variables, this association is as strong as for patients experiencing current abuse" (McCauley, Schroeder, and Bass, p.1).¹⁶

In the Facts For Families Newsletter, published by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (November 1995), an article entitled Child Abuse-The Hidden Bruises, gives further support to my hypothesis:

Often the severe emotional damage to abused children does not surface until adolescence or later, when many abused children become abusing parents. An adult who was abused as a child has trouble establishing intimate personal relationships, with a tendency to see all other adults as potential abusers... Without proper treatment, they can be damaged for life.¹⁷

There are far too many articles on this subject than could ever be put in this study, all with exactly the same message: what happens in childhood affects us for the rest of our lives. I hope these brief insights have helped to make my point: the previously mentioned researchers failed to go the distance; they looked only at outcomes, and not for underlying causes. I believe their various diagnoses would have changed considerably had they taken the time to gather all the information.

Taking my own good advice, I did an in-depth study of Byron's psychosocial history—from his birth, to his death. I tracked the development of his symptoms, and I looked for possible causes. Further, I looked for precursor symptoms—that is, early behaviors that might be predictive of impending psychosis.

The approach I used is as follows: First, I looked carefully at Byron's psychological symptoms, in hopes of determining their potential for developing into a particular disorder, as many disorders seem to exhibit their own behavioral continuum. Because I know that many disorders "mimic" each other, that is, they share common symptoms, it was necessary to differentiate between disorders. This "narrowing down" was done through the process of elimination of symptoms that did not apply. When I was finally convinced that I had at last isolated Byron's particular disorder (in his case, disorders), I turned to the DSM-IV, to see if my

findings were supported by current DSM-IV guidelines.

DIAGNOSING ACROSS TIME

Some skeptics may find it ludicrous to administer modern diagnostic tools across centuries, in an attempt to get the dead to give up their psychological secrets. However, this is not as far-fetched as it sounds. For instance, I think we can all agree that extremely abused children in general—of any age, and from any age—do not usually become mentally healthy adults. As will be shown, abused children in the present era display the same types of symptoms as did Byron. These behavioral commonalities serve as markers in attempting to identify specific disorders.

Granted, trying to match symptomological behavior to a psychological disorder is easier when working with living populations, as you have the client's input (and the input of significant others) regarding his or her history, not to mention the luxury of observing the client over time. Such a technique, is fairly unreliable with dead populations, therefore, to compensate for the poor observational and diagnostic circumstances, I believe research into the past histories of these posthumous clients is vital; this necessitates treating each deceased personality individually.

With that in mind, I decided that my baseline research should be identifying those disorders in the DSM-IV that share some common symptoms with bipolar disorder (since that is the diagnosis with which modern psychology has labeled

Byron). After reviewing the most likely disorders, I narrowed my list to the most obvious choice: (309.81) Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

However, I concluded that PTSD was probably preceded by a severe attachment disorder (Not severe enough to meet the criteria for Radical Attachment Disorder.) Therefore, it was necessary to employ the (323.9) classification: Disorder of Infancy Not Otherwise Specified. The latter category is for those disorders that do not quite fit in DSM-IV descriptors. In Byron's case, it would be some form of warped attachment disorder, the parameters of which will be drawn from attachment studies.

Both Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and severe attachment disorders demand that I look at past events in Byron's life, and the severe attachment diagnosis requires that I look at Byron's life from the moment of birth. This I have done; but I felt it necessary to also include information on Byron's maternal and paternal ancestors, as both sides of his family were littered with disordered personalities, which some researchers (especially Jamison) feel infers a genetic link. In other words, the genetic contention is that Byron was the recipient of some kind of an unavoidable madness gene. Had I not addressed this aspect, my research might have been found lacking by supporters of that theory. Therefore, before presenting the arguments in opposition to the genetic theories, I will present the family data respon-

sible for those theories. The following chapter will provide information on both the Byrons and the Gordons.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GORDONS OF GIGHT

This information on the Gordons serves to demonstrate just how uncivilized a line they were, and why some researchers might view them as being possessed of a "madness gene." Barbarians among barbarians, they became legend even in song—some of which are still sung in Scotland today. This is the brutal stock from which Catherine Gordon (Byron's mother) descended.

According to Andres Maurois, "these lairds of Gight kept the north country in terror," for an entire century.¹⁸ So infamous were they, that many of the cruel exploits of these cynical, fascinating men were passed on through generations in the form of Scottish ballads. Maurois quotes one that tells of a Gordon who was "adored by his wife whilst he himself loved the lady of Bignet. He was sentenced to death for the murder of five orphans whose fortune he coveted, and on the day of his execution his wife came to beg the king's pardon."¹⁹ The ballad goes as follows:

O Geordie, Geordie, I lo'e ye weel,
Nae jealousy could move me;
The birds in air that fly in pairs
Can witness how I lo'e ye.

The king was touched and granted a pardon; but when he was set free Gordon turned on his wife, crying fiercely:

A finger o' Bignet's lady's hand
Is worth a' your fair body!²⁰

Infidelity and disgraceful treatment of spouses were

the least offensive of the Gordon behaviors. Consider the following:

Alexander Gordon [was] murdered. John Gordon[was] hanged for the killing of Lord Moray in 1592, another John Gordon [was hanged] in 1634 for the assassination of Wallerstein. [It] seemed as if a Gordon of Gight had been strung up on every branch of their family tree...²¹

Dr. Leslie Marchand's studies brought him to the same conclusions about the Gordons; he states:

With due allowance for the lawlessness of the time... from their beginnings through the sixteenth century... the Gight Gordons had a record of violence and banditry, of feuding and murder, which pales into insignificance the peccadilloes of the Byrons."²²

The following quotes exemplify the type of ruthless brutality that was common practice among the Gordons:

Sir George Gordon, the second laird, on October 12, 1564, with his son and eighteen others, was arraigned before the Privy Council for the 'crewale invasion of William Con of Auchry and hurting and wounding of him in divers parts of his body to the great effusion of his blude; and striking and dragging with a brydill three of Con's cottars and otheris.'²³

And from seventeenth century archives, comes this illustrated account of Gordon behavior:

In 1601, the Mowats having complained of the depredations and destructive raids of the Gordons, a messenger of the Privy Council was sent with letters against William Gordon (then the fifth laird) charging him to answer for certain crimes. The messenger would have been shot had not the laird been restrained. Hurling him into the hall, William

seized the letters, cast them into a dish of broth, and with a dagger at his heart forced the officer to 'sup and swallow thame.'²⁴

Maurois discusses the sociological background that allowed the Gordons to develop into such a savage breed: "in Scotland longer than elsewhere, manners had remained feudal...indeed barbaric...a dangerous breed of well-born brigands thus came into being."²⁵ Concerning the Gordons, he points out that "even in childhood their temper clearly shown," and mentions the following incident that occurred in 1610: "Three young Gordons barricaded themselves in the Aberdeen Grammar School, and there, with sword and pistol, resisted an all-night attack."²⁶

As if the previous accounts were not proof enough of Gordons barbarian ways, Maurois provides us with further examples of Gordon exploits. He begins, "such were the lairds of Gight, men marked with the brand of Cain."²⁷ Further he says:

Even although the Crown became stronger during the eighteenth century and was able to compel a respect for law, the string of violent deaths went on as before. Alexander Gordon was drowned; his son George Gordon was drowned (doubtless suicidally) in the Bath Canal. And this last-named was the father of the Catherine Gordon [Lord Byron's mother] who, a few years later, was inflamed by the gallant eyes of Captain Byron with a love as fierce and reckless as that of her ancestors in the ballad.²⁸

The end result of those generations of barbarity was

Catherine Gordon, malevolent mother of Lord Byron. Maurois provides information regarding Catherine Gordon's upbringing and temperament; we are told that she was raised by her grandmother Mrs. Duff who:

saw to it that she had a fair education, and was imbued with the traditional Whig politics of the Duffs.... She was instilled with the rigid thriftiness of their people.... She had all the violent temper of the Gordons, and no less of their impulsiveness in action. She also had their courage, as was made very plain when she married this most formidable of husbands on May 13, 1784 at Bath, the very place where her father had drowned himself.²⁹

Maurois believes that the Gordon barbarity "was beyond their control, something inborn," and mentions that "the sixth laird, a conscious evildoer, used to say: 'I can tak' no rest. I know I will die upon a scaffold. There is an evil turn in my hand.'"³⁰ Unfortunately Maurois did not have access to the theories of modern psychiatry, psychology or genetics and made little use of the psychological theories that were available.

Hopefully, these brief exemplars of Gordon history have provided enough family background information to demonstrate why some researchers have concluded that genetics is the key to Lord Byron's behavior. However, as will be shown, even negative genetic tendencies can be overridden, or altered significantly, with the proper environment.

THE BYRONS

The Byrons, while certainly not as barbaric as the Gordons, displayed their own brand of unstable tendencies through several generations. And although it would not be unreasonable to consider some of those behaviors a result of genetic propensity, current research shows that hostile or bizarre environments (such as the Byrons provided for their offspring), could have caused psychological damage to a child with perfect genetic structure.

In a very few words, Leslie Marchand has summed up the psychosocial fiber of which the Byron family is woven:

The Byrons, who with some uncertainty trace their ancestry back to the Buruns, contemporaries of William the Conqueror, seem to have grown more irresponsible with each generation, until the summit of social irregularity is reached in the character and conduct of the great uncle and the father of the poet, if not indeed in the poet himself.³¹

Marchand points out that the trouble seems to have begun with the fourth Lord Byron (there was a long line). The fourth Lord Byron, for whatever reason, took three wives in succession. The third, Frances (daughter of William Lord Berkeley) was the poet's great grandmother. According to Marchand, it was she "who may have contributed more to the waywardness and eccentricity of her descendants than all the rest."³² Little is known about her, but Marchand's ancestral studies indicate that all her descendants displayed irregularities of behavior not before observed in the Byron

line.

On the surface, one might jump to the conclusion that this indicates that there is a genetic component underlying the obviously disordered Byronic personality. As mentioned several times, this is within the realm of possibility. However, as recent neurological research has shown, children raised in abusive situations undergo changes in brain chemicals that can result in abnormal behavior. Equally important to remember, when assessing Lord Byron, is that he believed his was a fated existence—he was doomed to be like his ancestors. And, as the following information will demonstrate, his ancestors gave new meaning to the term bizarre.

Six children were born to the fourth Baron Byron and Francis Berkeley. I will limit myself to discussing the three most important ones, William, the fifth lord, the poet's uncle (AKA, The "Wicked" Lord), John, grandfather of the poet (known as "Foul-Weather" Jack), who had a stormy naval career as both a commodore, and as an admiral, and "Mad Jack," father of the poet. Byron scholar, Elizabeth Longford, gives us a fair idea of the nature of the nature of the eccentricities and irregularities of behavior displayed by Foul-Weather Jack:

'Foul-weather Jack' or 'Hardy Byron' had been shipwrecked off the coast of Patagonia. The kindly young castaway from the Wager adopted a stray dog which he named Boxer. Despite his protests, his

starving inmates made Boxer into a stew, compounding their offense by offering none to his master. Eventually young Jack Byron dug up the remains and ate the skin and paws—a comically macabre incident which the admiral's grandson (Byron the poet) transferred from his grand-dad's' diary to his own Don Juan.³³

Byron's great uncle, the fifth Lord Byron (the Wicked Lord), was perhaps the most bizarre. He murdered his cousin as a result of an argument over how best to deal with poachers. "Using a sword, he made a wide gash in his cousin's stomach, penetrating the naval."³⁴ Longford tells us, that he was acquitted but "lived henceforth as a scandalous recluse at Newstead Abbey."³⁵

It would be a tremendous understatement to refer to the Wicked Lord's behavior as simply wayward, irregular, or eccentric. Maurois does an excellent job of defining these behaviors; the quote is necessarily long:

[He was] vile-tempered, and always carried pistols in his belt. He severed himself from all mankind, and did all he could to ruin his heirs. He paid his gambling debts with the oaks of the park [of his] Newstead Abbey Estate [He] felled five thousand pounds worth, strip[ping] his marvelous forest nearly bare of timber. [He] killed two thousand seven hundred deer in the park. His pleasures were much like a mischievous child. He would go down and open sluice-gates on the streams in order to damage the cotton mills; he emptied his neighbors ponds; and on the edge of his own lake he had two small stone forts constructed, with a fleet of toy ships which he used sometimes to launch. He would spend whole days directing naval

battles between the vessels and the forts. They fired on each other with miniature cannons. Sometimes his Lordship would lie on the floor of the Abbey kitchen, and amuse himself by staging races of cockroaches up and down his own body, flipping the insects with straws when they were sluggish. The servants used to say that the insects knew their own master and obeyed him.³⁶

If these accounts seem wildly apocryphal, and no doubt they do, it may help to know that the historical and biographical research data, gathered by the leading Byron scholars, is in strong agreement where the factuality of these events is concerned. Because there were so many fraudulent stories circulating (especially about the Wicked Lord), it was necessary for biographers to separate fact from fiction. For instance, there is apparently no truth to the report that the Wicked Lord threw Lady Byron into the pond, "or of his shooting a coachman for a minor offense, pitching the corpse into the coach with his wife, and then mounting the box and driving off."³⁷ Biographers are divided in their reports as to whether the insects that he allowed to run up and down his body were truly cockroaches or simply crickets. However, according to His Lordship's servant, they were definitely cockroaches.

Moving on to "Mad Jack" Byron, father of the poet. Longford tells us that Mad Jack "had all the dash of a guard's captain," which is, no doubt, what attracted Catherine to him.³⁸ John "Mad Jack" Byron had been trained

in a French military academy, and entered the Guards, serving in the American war while he was still hardly more than a boy. His violent character, wild behavior and soaring debts gave him the well-earned nickname of "Mad Jack."³⁹

"Mad Jack was more adept at capturing heiresses than enemies."⁴⁰ Mad Jack married and squandered the fortunes of several heiresses, including that of Catherine Gordon, the poet's mother. But, as Longford tells us, "Mad Jack decamped once more to France where he poured out his love on a woman far dearer than his wife—his sister Mrs. Frances Leigh."⁴¹ Longford suggests that the "Celtic appreciation of consanguinity may have accounted for the many loves between siblings and cousins among the Byrons. The Admiral himself had been remarkably fond of his sister Isabella."⁴²

The Byron's, though not barbarians like the Gordons, possessed such a variety of personality disturbances, that it would be almost impossible to conclude that they all suffered from the same genetically based mental disorder. More than likely, their respective offspring were raised in such bizarre environments, that each new Byron developed maladaptive behaviors that were peculiarly their own.

IT'S NOT ALL IN THE GENES

It would be very easy to look at the previous familial information and, without a second thought, assume that all of Byron's problems were a matter of his genetic fate. Regardless of how tempting that conclusion might be, such

thinking must be tempered with current, reliable research in the fields of psychiatry, psychology, physiology, primatology, sociology, and medicine. There is ample, quality research in all of these fields, which indicates that positive experiences can override (or at least improve on) poor genetic (behavioral) potential. Conversely, the best genetic structuring can go awry when exposed to constant trauma. Although Chapters Four and Five will take an in-depth look at the research, the following brief insights should help clarify my contentions.

Bruce Perry, researcher at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, supports and reiterates my position on the importance of environment and upbringing. Perry, who studies the "physiology of abused and neglected children at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, says, 'I think there are people who, for genetic reasons are more susceptible to certain kinds of stressful stimulation, but even with optimum genetic organization, trauma will create the problems we're talking about.'⁴³ Many of the children that Perry sees have come from homes very like Byron's, that is, they have "been exposed to domestic violence, and their unpredictable and threatening home lives can be read in both their physiology and their behavior."⁴⁴ According to Perry:

[These children] seem to be in a perpetual state of arousal: their 'flight or fight' response has somehow been permanently activated, and they have tense muscles, rapid heart rates, and trouble

sleeping. Their stress-response systems may be irreparably altered. These kids grow up with a neurophysiology that is perfectly adapted to survive in a chaotic, distressing environment. They develop this extreme hypervigilance because they never know what is going to happen next."⁴⁵

Finally, on the subject of a genetic basis for depression, it does seem that "the children of depressed mothers are at an increased risk for depression themselves, [however] most psychologists think the risk cannot be ascribed entirely to genetics."⁴⁶ Geraldine Dawson, psychologist at the University of Washington in Seattle, has shown (using EEG studies), "that babies whose mothers are depressed have reduced activity in the left frontal region of the brain-the area implicated in joy, interest, and other positive emotions."⁴⁷ The bottom line here is that "Growing up in even a mildly bad environment can affect your biology."⁴⁸

Had Lord Byron been a victim of merely a "mildly bad" environment, he most likely would not have been so tormented a person. Unfortunately, he was physically and emotionally abused by his mother, neglected by his father, and sexually abused by his nurse, and very likely by an older male companion as well. He experienced it all. It seems that there is almost no need to look for genetic factors when a child has been raised in this kind of hell.

The results of this upbringing can be clearly seen in Byron's social behavior, which has been captured for all

time in highly emotional anecdotal records by his contemporaries: biographers, relatives, friends and acquaintances. Modern biographers, too, have extracted what appear to be highly accurate personality descriptors from his poetry, prose, letters and journals. Some of the most telling and heart wrenching evidence of Byron's emotional pain is found in his own letters written to his half-sister, Augusta—letters fraught with his "private outpourings" of grief.⁴⁹

Because Byron felt the need to express his every feeling, and because he was so honest in his self-revealing comments, almost every work he produced provided biographers with a very complete autobiographical record. Examples of this impulsive, cathartic honesty can be found in almost everything he wrote. Manfred, for example, was "mainly inspired by remorse and dissatisfaction with events in his past which made him wretched."⁵⁰ Byron refers here to his incestuous love affair with his half-sister, Augusta, who in the poem was called "Asarte." His description of her is too transparent to hide the truth:

Manfred. She was like me in lineaments
—her eyes, Her hair, her features, all,
to the very tone
Even of her voice, they said were like
to mine;
But soften'd all, and temper'd into
beauty:
She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings,
The quest of hidden knowledge, and a
mind
To comprehend the universe: nor these
Alone, but with them gentler powers than

mine,
Pity, and smiles, and tears—which I had
not;
And tenderness—but that I had for her;
humility—and that I never had.
Her faults were mine—her virtues were
her own—
I loved her, and destroy'd her!⁵¹

In the same poem, Byron talks openly about his internal torture for the wretchedness he brought upon himself. He is Manfred, and he is "powerless to escape from himself and forget his identity:"

My solitude is solitude no more,
But peopled with the Furies,—I have gnash'd
My teeth in darkness till returning morn
Then cursed myself till sunset;—I have pray'd
For madness as a blessing—'tis denied me.
I have affronted death—but the war
Of elements the waters shrunk from me,
And fatal things pass'd harmless—the cold hand
Of an all-pitiless demon held me back,
Back by a single hair, which would not break.⁵²

The object of Manfred's incantation is Annabella (his wife) who did all she could to slander his name after their separation:

From thy false tears I did distil
An essence which hath strength to kill;
From thy own heart I then did wring
The black blood in its blackest spring;
From thy own smile I snatch'd the snake,
For there it coil'd as in a brake;
From thy own lip I drew the charm
Which gave all these their chiefest harm:
In proving every poison known, I found the
strongest was thine own.

By thy cold breast and serpent smile,
By thy unfathom'd gulfs of guile,
By that most seeming virtuous eye,
By thy shut soul's hypocrisy;

By the perfection of thine art
Which pass'd for human thine own heart;

And by thy brotherhood of Cain,
I call upon thee, and compel
Thyself to be thy proper Hell!⁵³

Maurois tells us that "One of the deepest roots of Manfred's anguish lay in the silence of Asarte—Augusta."⁵⁴ In real life, during the scandal surrounding his divorce, he was entirely disheartened by Augusta's failure to come to his support. She remained silent, compounding his agony, an agony from which he never recovered. When Manfred is facing death, and the Abbot is offering him penitence and pardon, his response can be viewed as a gauge of the internal destruction he has undergone:

Old man! there is no power in holy men,
Nor charm in prayer—nor purifying form
Of penitence—nor outward look—nor
fast—Nor agony—nor, greater than all
these, The innate tortures of that deep
despair, Which is remorse without the
fear of hell, But all in all sufficient
to itself Would make a hell out of
heaven—can exorcise From out the un-
bounded spirit, the quick sense Of its
own sins, wrongs, sufferance, and re-
venge Upon itself: there is no future
pang Can deal that justice on the
self-condemn'd He deals on his own
soul.⁵⁵

As should seem obvious, Byron's work is mostly concerned with Byrons life. As will be shown, his writing was a form of psychotherapy for him, and had great cathartic value. Hence, it is all highly personal, and provides enormous amount of psychological information about him. On

the subject of trying to separate the poet from his works, Thomas Moore, his close companion and first biographer, stated that:

What has been said of Petrarch, that 'his correspondence and verses together afford the progressive interest of a narrative in which the poet is always identified with the man,' will be found applicable, in a far greater degree, to Lord Byron, in whom the literary and personal characters were so closely interwoven that to have left his works without the instructive commentary which his Life and Correspondence afford, would have been equally an injustice both to himself and to the world.⁵⁶

World renowned Byron scholar, Leslie Marchand, in speaking of Byron's honesty stated that "[Byron was] disarmingly frank in his confessions of his own peccadilloes, with a delightfully fresh observation of human character and human frailties, and a unique facility for lucid and concrete expression."⁵⁷ In attempting to explain Byron's seeming contradictions in nature, Marchand said:

Byron struck the human balance between idealistic aspiration and realistic disillusionment. And he refused to ignore any note of feeling in the gamut that runs from one to the other, his self-honesty compelling him to record every nuance of the 'mobility' of his nature.⁵⁸

American critic Hoxie Neal Fairchild, simply and adeptly, captured this aspect of Byron's personality: "Byron was too idealistic to refrain from blowing bubbles, and too realistic to refrain from pricking them."⁵⁹

John Ruskin, British writer and art critic, was completely impressed with the truthfulness in Byron's work. "Here at last," Ruskin concludes, discussing Byron's prose and verse as facts of the same genius, "I had found a man who spoke only of what he had seen and known; and spoke without exaggeration, without mystery, without, enmity. That is so;—make what you will of it!"⁶⁰

And what did Byron have to say about his own truthfulness? "My first object is truth even at my own expense."⁶¹

The information contained in Byron's poetry, letters and journals is a must for anyone who wishes to know and understand the mental functioning of Lord Byron. This is a ponderous (but vital) undertaking. For only with an in-depth study of his life and resultant personality traits, can you hope to perform a meaningful (and hopefully valid) psychological evaluation of his long-dead lordship.

To begin to know Byron, one must view him from many vantage points. This is so, because his paradoxical behaviors cannot be otherwise explained. To accomplish this task, and to help facilitate an understanding of the dichotomous personality traits of the adult poet (traits no doubt responsible for many incorrect bipolar diagnoses), the following chapter will contain anecdotes, observations, and opinions—some from supporters, some from detractors. Combined, this collection of brief insights should begin to weave an image of the complicated psychological fabric that

underlies the personality of Lord Byron. Once this personality portrait has been completed, I will move on to Byron's childhood, and the important diagnostic issues.

CHAPTER THREE

GETTING TO KNOW BYRON: OBSERVATIONS, ANECDOTES, AND HIS IMPACT ON THE WORLD

In Childe Harold, Canto IV, Byron wrote: "There is that within me which shall tire torture and time, and breathe when I expire."⁶² How aware he was of the truth embedded in that statement, cannot be known. But I feel certain he would be pleased to know that 174 years after his expiration, his persona lives on, and his voice is still heard. He has thousands of devoted followers. Almost every major country in the world has a Lord Byron Society, and there is an international chapter as well. It is a credit to some quality that existed within him that this kind of adoration and loyalty still continues so many generations after his death. Byron scholar, Leslie Marchand, put it succinctly, "Byron has remained a refreshing spirit attuned to every time and every clime."⁶³ And, not surprisingly, after all those many years, the controversy surrounding his personality and behavior is also alive and well.

There still exist literary moralists who view Byron as a weak poet, and an even weaker human being. But there are an equal number who view him as a poetic genius, and the consummate Byronic hero. Obviously, it is these two opposing points of view that have given rise to the controversy that has continued these many long years. This chapter will contain opinions, observations and anecdotal records, the

purpose of which is to equip the reader with sufficient social commentary, so as to illuminate, for the reader, the two opposing points of view. The information gathered stands as evidence of the impact (good and bad) Lord Byron made on individuals, and the world.

I would like to begin with modern day Byron scholar, Ernest J. Lovell, who (lovingly) captured Byron's many sides in one very descriptive sentence, when he referred to Byron as:

The humorous romantic, the soldier poet, the reluctant literary lion who fattened on social approval and defied public morality, the monogamous roué, the sexual athlete with a streak of homosexuality, the genius with the common and sometimes vulgar touch."⁶⁴

Speaking not so lovingly were many of Byron's contemporaries who thought "he was at once titillating and shocking, and they lamented and moralized upon the sad spectacle of his wasted powers."⁶⁵ Lord Carlyle (Byron's cousin, and guardian), although quite fond of Byron, said, "he had the useless, dangerous strength of a volcano."⁶⁶ Lady Caroline Lamb observed the women flocking to him at a social event, and wrote in her journal later that evening, "He is mad, bad, and dangerous to know."⁶⁷

So shocked was English society by Byron's behavior, that local poets and writers (some of them would be) published their venomous anti-Byron verses in various local chronicles. Poet, and respected literary figure of the day,

Robert Southey "made a pointed reference to Byron, without naming him, as the leader of the Satanic school of writers whose works 'breathe the spirit of Belial in their lascivious parts' and a 'Satanic spirit of pride and audacious impiety.'" ⁶⁸ An anonymous critic composed the following lines that appeared in a literary journal:

Vain shallow sophist, arrogant as weak...
Thou reptile form, thou crawling piece of earth...
Thou grand apostate of the scowling eye...
Thou worse than Satan in a serpent's form.... ⁶⁹

Another contributor, no doubt, experienced catharsis by writing this bile-filled poem:

Oh! that an angel's pow'r or seraph's might
Would hurl thee headlong from they topmost height,
Cast thee confounded on the Stygian shore,
That all thy blasphemies be heard no more! ⁷⁰

Sir Edgerton Bridges, "an amiable baronet of sixtyone," wrote the following excerpts from a collection of forty-one such short essays, shortly after Byron's death:

The fiercer passions seemed to have prevailed exclusively over the mind of Lord Byron. Tender affection, timidity, sorrow, sympathy, appear to have had little influence over him; a love of power and of the unlimited exercise of his caprice, and anger and violent resentment at whatever thwarted his purposes, were his habitual temperament. It did not seem that any hold could be made upon his conscience, or the nicety of his regard to the interests and happiness of others....

He took offense without cause; and revenged without bounds, trifling or imagined injuries. Goodness gave him no pleasure as goodness; but only so far as it happened to suit some transient

humour."⁷¹

Sir Bridges, like many other anti-Byron writers, wrote his poisonous lines without knowing Byron on a personal level. Those people who had been life-long friends with his lordship could never view him as the evil genius defined in the above quotes. In fact, Sir Bridges, between his twenty-ninth and thirtieth Letters, "conversed intimately with a gentleman who, at a late period of Lord Byron's life, spent many of his days with him."⁷² See how Sir Bridges writing changes, after discussing Byron with someone [most likely Thomas Medwin] who had known Byron for only a short time:

As to his occasional severity and bitterness ... he had good reason for his discontents and resentments.... He was sometimes criticized in the most foul and treacherous manner; and it will hereafter be proved that some of the charges of bitterness and gross abuse which have been heaped most heavily on his name were firstly provoked by outrageous aggression.⁷³

Obviously, a little knowledge went a long way with Sir Bridges; in fact, it turned a "fairly severe critic into a fervent apologist," as can be seen from Letter XXXIII:

Much of that gloom and those bursts of indignation...which have been pursued with such tirades of censure had a natural and venial, if not justifiable, cause; and not only do not prove the heartless pride and selfishness imputed to him, but prove, on the contrary, that with all his outward port of haughty and reckless disregard, he had at the bottom, a bosom of tenderness; a deep, considerate, contemplative mind, intensely sensitive to the sorrows of

our nature, a conscience awake, full of regrets.⁷⁴

If Sir Bridges could experience such a reversal of attitude, after a mere discussion with a Byron sympathizer, imagine the fraternity and solidarity expressed by Byron's friends and supporters.

Consider the following statements from a document entitled Opinions of Eminent Men of Byron: German writer and scientist Johann Goethe said that "Byron must without a doubt be regarded as the greatest genius of this age. The glory which he has reflected on his country is without bounds in its splendour & incalculable in its consequences." Italian patriot Giuseppe Mazzini stated, "It is since Byron that the inhabitants of the continent have learned to study Shakespeare." French political leader, diplomat and writer, Francois René de Chateaubriand remarked, "Let the English take care, if they break the image of the man who has made them revive, what will remain?" Ste Beuve, the most eminent of French critics, stated: "There are only three great poets, Byron, Milton, and Pindar." British writer Sir Walter Scott observed, "This generation has produced no man who approached Lord Byron in originality, the first attribute of a genius." British politician Disraeli, Lord Beaconsfield said of Byron, "He died not only admired in his own country but revered and adored in Europe. British writer and art critic, John Ruskin, commenting on Byron's

poetry stated, "Here is entirely first rate work.... It ought to be our school introduction to the literature of the world (Refer to Lord Byron Society of Newstead Abbey, or British Museum Library Catalogue 8,9)." According to Maurois, French writer Gustave Flaubert "drew sustenance from Byron, and in the course of a pilgrimage to Chillon, in 1845, he found a sacred joy in the sight of that name carved in the stone."⁷⁵

It requires little rumination to conclude that there are two quite disparate sets of opinions regarding Lord Byron. In fact, it would almost seem as though the two disparate factions were commenting on two distinctly different people—or on one person with a dual personality. I feel certain, that such polar opposite commentary, combined with Byron's intermittent rages and depressions, are the underlying reasons for the very popular bipolar diagnosis. The following anecdotal records should shed more light on the reason for the contradictory points of view, and the behavior that prompted it.

I would like to start with the observations of Lady Byron (not his mother, but Annabella Milbanke, his wife), who contributed greatly to the dissemination of character-assassinating commentaries that circulated in England and beyond. On the evening of their fatal marriage, while preparing for bed, she recalled, "He asked me with an appearance of aversion if I meant to sleep in the same bed

with him—said that he hated sleeping with any woman, but I might do as I chose."⁷⁶ In all fairness to Byron, "he always slept apart from his mistresses, out of embarrassment about his foot."⁷⁷

On another night Lady Byron recalled, that he came back to her exhausted and haggard. "Seeking to allay his misery, she rested her head on his breast. He said gently but with bitterness, 'You should have a softer pillow than my heart.'"⁷⁸ Early on in the relationship Annabella felt sorry for him even in his harsher moods; she stated that "He inflicted misery, but I felt that he suffered more than he inflicted."⁷⁹ Her empathy was not long lived.

Shortly after their marriage, while visiting Byron's sister Augusta (with whom he had a lengthy incestuous affair) he did, in fact, display the level of cruelty he could inflict:

That night and every night of their stay was a nightmare for Annabella. Byron insisted on staying up with Augusta after his wife had gone to bed. If she lingered, he would take a savage delight in insulting her into retiring. 'We don't want you, my charmer.' His cruelty turned upon Augusta as well, probably, because he saw that she had firmly determined not to renew their former physical intimacy.

In his blacker moods, [Byron's] impulse to torment both women (Annabella and Augusta) increased to mania [Mania as it is used here does not qualify as true mania as defined in the DSM-IV]. Byron's frustration drove him to crude innuendoes about the past that shocked

his wife and 'sometimes made Augusta ready to sink.'⁸⁰

According to Marchand Byron "made his wife the scape-goat for all his troubles."⁸¹ However, he believes that "it is probable that [Byron's] threats were idle outbursts of frustration and anger, but they were cruel enough to a wife approaching her confinement."⁸² Annabella claimed that only three hours before labor began Byron had made appalling statements to her. "Amid expressions of abhorrence," he told her "he hoped she would die and that the child too would perish, and that if it lived he would curse it ."⁸³ During her labor, "she thought he was throwing soda-water bottles at the ceiling of the room below the one in which she was lying in order to deprive her of sleep."⁸⁴

Byron's friend, Hobhouse, examined the ceiling, found no incriminating marks, and therefore put an end to the "bottle" story. Furthermore, he stated that "Byron's habit of drinking soda-water, in consequence of taking magnesia in quantities, and of knocking off the heads of the bottles with a poker, sufficiently accounted for the noise."⁸⁵

Many of the more shocking aspects of Byron's behavioral repertoire were made public after his separation from Lady Byron. Lady Caroline Lamb, an unstable woman of minuscule moral fiber, who considered herself to be a woman scorned by Byron, (she pursued him relentlessly, and he did eventually reject her) rushed to the aid of Lady Byron relaying to her

squalid epithets concerning Byron's deviant past.

Caroline disclosed information that she claimed Byron gave her "first by innuendo and later by outright avowal" about his incestuous relationship with his sister Augusta, and his various homosexual experiences with Robert Rushton (a handsome boy and former tenant), whom he supposedly corrupted, and "three schoolfellows who were thus perverted." Furthermore, she said that he "practiced this...unnatural crime [homosexuality] unrestrictedly in Turkey."⁸⁶

From that moment, the scandalous gossip spread beyond England, and back again. While staying with Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley, and her half-sister, Claire Clairmont (with whom Byron had a daughter) at the Villa Diodati in Geneva, news had gone back to England that he (Byron) "and that notorious atheist, young Mr. Shelley, had established a satanic 'league of incest' and were living with two sisters 'in promiscuous intercourse.'"⁸⁷

In Italy, his reputation preceded him:

He was a menagerie animal, a rhinoceros at the ball. After nights spent in unbelievable debaucheries, they whispered, he would leap from his bed seize the sword which he always kept by his side, and clad only in his night-shirt, would fence with the window-curtains!"⁸⁸

Following is an example of Italian public opinion of his Lordship's character:

[Byron] Dedicates his life only to study

and to the pleasures of Love. Also, even as he gives free rein to his thoughts, so also does he show no restraint in satisfying his desires, and even less in telling everyone about his amorous adventures.⁸⁹

Peter Quennell defined Byron's lifestyle in Venice:

"Unnamed and unnumbered, his concubines came and went—usually women of the poorer class, loud and quarrelsome, yet gifted with a power of expression that often delighted him."⁹⁰ Quennell was not entirely correct, for in a letter to one Wedderburn Webster, Byron made known the level of debauchery at which he functioned, and he even provided an estimate of the number of women involved:

In the last two years I have been at Venice, I have spent about five thousand pounds, and I need not have spent a third of this, had it not been that I have a passion for women which is expensive in its variety every where, but less so in Venice than in other cities ... more than half was laid out in the Sex;—to be sure I have had plenty for the money, that's certain—I think at least two hundred of one sort or another perhaps more, for I have not lately kept the recount.⁹¹

It seems Byron's life of debauchery crept into his writing as well—which is not unusual, for most of Byron's work is autobiographical. When Byron wrote Don Juan, Murray (his publisher), and several of his friends felt that the subject matter was too indecent for English society, as its content dealt with Byron's "opinions and some fun, with a detailed account of [his] marriage and its consequences."⁹²

One critic objected to the quick succession of fun and gravity in the poem: "We are never scorched and drenched at the same time."⁹³ Byron replied in this manner:

Blessings on his experience! Did he never spill a dish of tea over his testicles in handing a cup to his charmer, to the great shame of his nankeen breeches? Did he never swim in the sea at Noonday with the Sun in his eyes and on his head, which all foam of Ocean could not cool? Did he never inject for a Gonorrhea? or make water through an ulcerated Urethra? Was he ever in a Turkish bath, that marble paradise of sherbet and Sodomy?⁹⁴

Distasteful as it was to him, Byron did eventually agree to make some changes in Don Juan:

I have left out all my loves (except in a general way), and many other of the most important things (because I must not compromise other people), so that it is like the play of Hamlet 'the part of Hamlet omitted by particular desire.'⁹⁵

This was apparently not sufficient for the watchdogs of morality, for, in Byron's own words "There has been an eleventh commandment to the women not to read it—and what is still more extraordinary they seem not to have broken it." In a letter to his friend, Douglas Kinnaird, Byron expresses "evidence of his unshaken confidence in the merits of the poem as an expression of the rigors of real life."⁹⁶ And real life it is, at least for Byron:

As to 'Don Juan,' confess, confess—you dog and be candid—that it is the sublime of *that there* sort of writing—it may be bawdy but is it not good English? It may be profligate but is it not *life*,

is it not the *thing*? Could any man have written it who has not lived in the world?—and tooled in a post-chaise?—in a hackney coach?—in a gondola?—against a wall?—in a court carriage?—in a vis-à-vis?—on a table?—and under it?." ⁹⁷

In this same letter, he mentions that, "I have been faithful to my honest liaison with Countess Guiccioli [a married woman]. I have not had a whore this half year, confining myself to the strictest adultery." ⁹⁸

Perhaps it is apparent why his critics used the terms evil genius and Satan to describe him. But despite his bawdy, often turbulent, and seemingly self-centered existence, he rendered hundreds of kindnesses, most often to the poor, who never knew the name of their benefactor. Further, he was at all times champion of the underdog—albeit in a very lordly way. The following anecdotes and observations are but a small fraction of the kind deeds that were as much a part of the everyday life of Lord Byron, as were his vices.

Countess Teresa Guiccioli, Byron's last personal female "attachment," in her book My Recollections of Lord Byron, wrote profusely of his many kindnesses:

His benevolence had nothing personal in its elements. It was a kind of universal and habitual charity, which gives without hope of return, which is more occupied with the good of others than with its own, and which is called for only by the instinctive desire to alleviate the sufferings of others....

There was not a single moment in his

life in which it did not reveal itself in the most touching actions. We have seen how neither happiness nor misfortune could alter it.⁹⁹

In regard to his servants, "Lord Byron," says [Thomas] Medwin, "was the best of masters, and it may be asserted that he was beloved by his servants; his goodness even extended to their families. He liked them to have their children with them."¹⁰⁰ "His indulgence towards his servants," says Mr. Hoppner, "was almost reprehensible, for even when they neglected their duty, [he] appeared rather to laugh at than to scold them, and he never could make up his mind to send them away, even after threatening to do so"¹⁰¹

Mr. Hoppner, continuing to speak of Byron's "indulgences," mentions an incident that involved His Lordship's gondolier, Tita Falier. It seems that the gondolier was taken for conscription. To release him required not only money, but certain measures were required to delay his departure. At this particular time Byron was about to leave on trip to Ravenna. "The money was given, and the much-desired journey was postponed."¹⁰² This was not unlike Byron, to put others before himself. "The result was," said Hoppner:

That his servants were so attached to him that they would have borne everything for his sake. His death plunged them into the deepest grief. I have in my possession a letter written to his family by Byron's gondolier, Tita, who followed him from Venice to Greece, and remained with him until his death. The

poor fellow speaks of his master in touching terms: he declares that in Byron he has lost rather a father than a master, and he does not cease to dilate upon the goodness with which Byron looked after the interests of all who served him.¹⁰³

In speaking of Byron's benevolence, the Countess Guiccioli tells us that:

His actions, above all, testify to his humane disposition. He never heard of the misfortune or suffering of a fellow-creature without endeavouring to relieve it, whether in London, Venice, Ravenna, Pisa, or Greece; he spared neither gold, time nor labour to achieve this object.¹⁰⁴

One example of this behavior occurred at Pisa, when Byron, hearing of "a wretched man, guilty of a sacreligious theft, was to be condemned to cruel torture,...became ill with dread and anxiety."¹⁰⁵ So sickened was he over this matter, that he "wrote to the English ambassador, and to the consuls, begging for their interposition; neglected no chance, and did not rest until he acquired the certainty that the penalty inflicted on the culprit would be more humane."¹⁰⁶

Byron's good friend, Percy Bysshe Shelley, remarked, "Not a quarter of his fortune, but the half of it, did he expend in alms. In Pisa, in Genoa, in Greece, his purse was ever open to the needy."¹⁰⁷ His physician, Dr. Bruno, said of Byron:

Not a day of his life in Greece but was marked by some charitable deed: not an

instance is there on record of a beggar having knocked at Lord Byron's door who did not go on his way comforted; so prominent among all his noble qualities was the tenderness of his heart, and its boundless sympathy with suffering and affliction.... Whenever it came to the knowledge of Lord Byron that any poor persons were lying ill, whatever the maladies or their cause, without even being asked to do it, my lord immediately sent me to attend to the sufferers. He provided the medicines, and every other means of alleviation. He founded at his own expense a hospital in Missolonghi."¹⁰⁸

Having observed many of Byron's kindnesses and heroic deeds, Count Gamba (Teresa's father) states:

Lord Byron never could witness a calamity as an idle spectator. He was so alive to the sufferings of others, that he sometimes allowed himself to be imposed upon too readily by tales of woe. The least semblance of injustice excited his indignation, and led him to intervene without a thought for the consequences to himself of his interposition; and he entertained this feeling not only for his fellow-creatures but even towards animals."¹⁰⁹

Count Gamba relates an incident that occurred while Byron was residing in Greece. A Colonel Napier, "one day rode in great haste to Lord Byron, to ask for his assistance," as a number of workmen had been "buried under the crumbling side of a mountain, in consequence of an impudent operation."¹¹⁰ Lord Byron:

Immediately dispatched his physician, and although just sitting down to table, had his horses saddled, and galloped off to the scene of the disaster, accompanied by Count Gamba and his suite.

Women and children wept and moaned, the crowd each moment increased, lamentations were heard on all sides, but, whether from despair or laziness, none came forward. Generous anger overcame Lord Byron at this scene of woe and shame; he leapt from his horse, and, grasping the necessary implements, began with his own hands the work of setting free the poor creatures, who were there buried alive. His example aroused the courage of the others, and the catastrophe was thus mitigated by the rescue of several victims."¹¹¹

Another occasion of Byronic benevolence, related by Count Gamba, from his long list of Byronic charitable acts, occurred as follows:

Having learnt at Pisa that a great number of vessels had been shipwrecked during a violent storm, in the very harbour of Genoa, and that several respectable families were thereby completely ruined, secretly sent them money, and to some more than 300 dollars. Those who received it never knew their benefactor's name."¹¹²

Gamba further states that Byron, "not satisfied with his casual or out-of-the-way charities, granted a large number of small monthly and weekly pensions."¹¹³

It is common knowledge that Byron went to Greece to aid them in their fight for freedom against the Turks. Count Gamba tells us, what is not so widely known is that "One of [Byron's] principal objects in Greece was to awaken the Turks as well as the Greeks to more humane sentiments."¹¹⁴ Further, he states, "[Byron] hastened whenever the opportunity arose, to purchase the freedom of women and children,

and to send them back to their homes."¹¹⁵ Says Gamba, of Byron:

He frequently, and not without incurring danger to himself, rescued Turks from the sanguinary grasp of the Greek corsairs. When a Moslem brig drifted ashore near Missolonghi, the Greeks wanted to capture the whole crew; but Lord Byron opposed it, and promised a reward of a crown for each sailor, and two for each officer rescued."¹¹⁶

Commenting on his own purposes for intervening in the Greek cause, Byron reveals the humanity behind the man, in the following letter:

Coming to Greece, one of my principal objects was to alleviate, as much as possible, the miseries incident to a warfare so cruel as the present. When the dictates of humanity are in question, I know no difference between Turks and Greeks. It is enough that those who want assistance are men, in order to claim the pity and protection of the meanest pretender to humane feelings. I have found here twenty-four Turks, including women and children, who have long pined in distress, far from the means of support and the consolations of their home. The Government has consigned them to me: I transmit them to Prevesa, whither they desire to be sent. I hope you will not object to take care that they may be restored to a place of safety, and that the Governor of your town may accept of my present. The best recompense I could hope for would be to find that I had inspired the Ottoman commanders with the same sentiments toward those unhappy Greeks, who may hereafter fall into their hands."¹¹⁷

When considering the range of behaviors that Lord Byron exhibited, one can see how difficult it would be to sum up

his personality. Luckily, Byron scholar, Peter Quennell has done an admirable job with this most difficult task:

At best [Byron's] character was a pattern of opposites; indeed, there is scarcely a quality, moral or intellectual, to be discerned in Byron's make-up that cannot, at one time or another, be paralleled by its exact antithesis. Thus, he was impetuous but cautious; devoted to his friends and yet, in many respects, an extremely untrustworthy intimate; soft-hearted, yet distinguished, now and then, by a streak of deliberate and cold-hearted cruelty; a lover of quiet and yet a perpetual focus of storms; generous and open-handed, yet, at all events in his later period, the 'damned close calculating fellow' of whom his Italian acquaintances often complained; puritanical but promiscuous; a person of rare common sense, a man of the world blessed with a skeptical and disbelieving irony, and yet the prey of superstitions without end.¹¹⁸

It appears that Byron's enigmatic behavior makes him a human conundrum. And what has Byron to say about all of this? As you will be able to discern by the following statement, he was metacognizant of his own puzzling nature:

People take for gospel all I say, and go away continually with false impressions. *Maisn'importe!* it will render the statements of my future biographers more amusing; as I flatter myself I shall have more than one. Indeed, the more the merrier, say I. One will present me as a sort of sublime misanthrope, with moments of kind feeling. Another will portray me as a modern Don Juan; and a third ... will, it is to be hoped, if only for oppositions sake, represent me as an amiable, ill-used gentleman, 'more sinned against than sinning.' Now, if I know myself, I should say, that I have no character at all....But, joking

apart, what I think of myself is, that I am so changeable, being everything by turns and nothing long—I am such a strange melange of good and evil, that it would be difficult to describe me.¹¹⁹

Never was one person so correct. Byron has kept his secret self to himself for one hundred and seventy-four years. I hope he will forgive me for meddling in his childhood, but it seems that only through the investigation of his early years will it be possible to access his secrets. And so, in the following chapter, I will begin with Byron's beginning—his unlucky birth circumstances. From there, I will trace his infancy and childhood as much as possible, through his many torturous trials and tribulations, for, as the DSM-IV points out, it is from such abusive upbringings, that Posttraumatic Stress Disorder arises.

CHAPTER FOUR

REGARDING LORD BYRON'S BIRTH CIRCUMSTANCES

Byron's mother, Catherine Gordon, was born into an uncouth, uncivil family, known as the Gordons of Gight. Marchand tells us:

The Gordons displayed a startling record of violence rare even in the annals of Scottish lairds. Beginning with Sir William Gordon, first of the house of Gight, who fell at Flodden Field in 1513, they presented, through the seventeenth century, a spectacle of unrestrained barbarity which rivaled the Newgate Calendar.¹²⁰

Young Catherine, I am afraid, possessed the same propensity for violent behavior and poor disposition as her parents, and the rest of the Gordons. It is easy to see why some researchers might go for the obvious, and explain away Lord Byron's behavior as being nothing more than his genetic inheritance. (Compounding the issue, is the fact that it would be hard to locate a normal ancestor in the Byron wing of the family.)

It is possible that Gordon behaviors might have been affected by a slight genetic propensity—after all, the behaviors did persist over centuries. But that violence begets violence is a concept with which people of all social strata (in our modern time) are painfully aware. Behavior displayed by uncivilized human beings, raised in uncivilized societies (such as the Gordons), is more than likely learned behavior, and therefore, can not be entirely, or even pri-

marily, the result of a genetically based mental disorder afflicting only the Gordons.

If one were to examine the range of psychotic behaviors demonstrated by modern day inner city children, you are more than likely to find those behaviors a result of violent lifestyle, rather than genetics. Maurois himself spoke of the feudal existence that permeated the social fiber of Scotland "longer than elsewhere."¹²¹ The infant Byron was born into this feudal environment—perhaps the only difference between an inner city upbringing and a hostile feudal one is the weapons.

THE GORDON HERITAGE: GENETIC OR ENVIRONMENTAL?

While no one denies that genetics can play a part in some disorders, new research indicates that having a genetic propensity toward a particular disorder does not mean that the disorder will be expressed. Stephen Suomi, a primatologist at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, has been studying the effects of rearing environments on the behavior of young rhesus macaques. "Suomi belongs to the league of scientists who are studying the role early childhood plays in determining adult behavior."¹²²

Suomi's experiment consists of placing the macaques in three distinctly different rearing settings. He then observes how behavior is affected by those environments. In his research, he has found that "the patterns have some genetic heritability, but our work shows that you can modify

these tendencies quite dramatically with certain types of early experiences."¹²³ Obviously, illness and diet are part of a child's early experience, but beyond that:

There's reason to believe that a child's experience of his parents is an especially potent sculptor of the parts of the brain involved in emotion, personality, and behavior. Some studies indicate the strength of a child's bonding with his caregivers may increase his ability to learn and to cope with stress. Others show that childhood abuse and neglect can prime the brain for a lifetime of inappropriate aggression and scattered attention.¹²⁴

Dr. Bruce Perry, who studies the physiology of abused and neglected children at Baylor College of Medicine, quite agrees with Suomi. He states, "I think there are people who, for genetic reasons are more susceptible to certain kinds of stressful stimulation, but even with optimum genetic organization, trauma will create the problems we're talking about."¹²⁵

Given her background, it should be evident that Catherine Gordon was not raised to be a fit mother. Her temperament alone would have been sufficient to cause great damage to a young mind, but her own miserable life circumstances were such that her already violent personality patterns would have been exacerbated significantly.

MOM WAS NO LADY

With the previous information in mind, let's take a closer look at Byron's mother. Peter Quennell, tells

us that "Mrs. Byron was coarse, stupid and had a violent temper."¹²⁶ That she had a violent temper should surprise no one, considering her family background. Her coarseness, in its many forms, will be exhibited throughout this paper, as it was inflicted upon Byron throughout his life. Besides being coarse, Catherine Gordon was a singularly unattractive woman, who wanted desperately to be loved for her self-imagined beauty. It was this personality feature that allowed her to dupe herself, and allowed others to dupe her as well. Catherine's personality traits, in combination with her disastrous married life, often produced volcanic emotional reactions. Quennell sums up the situation in which young Catherine found herself, while trying to adjust to the burden of marriage and motherhood:

John "Mad Jack" Byron [Catherine's husband, and father of the poet] squandered her wealth leaving her [a] poor unhappy creature....On her return to England, [Catherine] had learned that she was ruined, reduced even to penury. She was twenty-three.

As a girl she had seen herself heiress of a great name and a great fortune; in her weakness she thought herself worthy of being loved, and had imagined that she was. She, on her side, had loved to distraction, and was loving still....She had to face the fact that she had been tricked and fleeced, that she was now in poverty, with a husband, an infant [Lord Byron] a nurse, and a house all on her hands.¹²⁷

A BRIEF LOOK AT DAD

There is little more to report on "Mad Jack" Byron, other than the information given in Chapter Two. He had almost no involvement in the raising of young George. In fact, he died when Byron was three and one half years of age, and he was less than three when he saw his father for the last time. Several sources mention that after Mad Jack had move out of the house (not being able to bear his wife, he was out of the house more than in), he asked if young Byron might spend the night with him. One night was sufficient; he quickly returned the child the next day, and never attempted to take him again. But what most rankled Catherine, was that "Mad Jack was more adept at capturing heiresses than enemies."¹²⁸ Mad Jack married several heiresses, then went on to squander their fortunes, her own included.

A GRAVELY DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

Though there is little documentation concerning the very early nurturing the infant Byron received, we can sumimize, given Mrs. Byron's personality and background, that her parenting style was not likely to produce a well-adjusted child. As can be gathered from the explosive, dysfunctional personality of Mrs. Byron, young Byron was undoubtedly raised in a hostile environment, not at all conducive to developing a healthy personality, or a healthy attachment to his caregivers, who knew no other way of life. Catherine, his mother, and his nurse, May Gray, all had a

heavy hand in the ruination of the young boy's childhood.

While reading this section, bear in mind the findings of Stephen Suomi in regard to "parents [being] an especially potent sculptor of the parts of the brain involved in emotion, personality, and behavior"¹²⁹

From his vast research, Leslie Marchand has put together a fairly vivid description of daily life in the Byron household: "With creditors close on his heels, Captain Byron fled again to Scotland, and by August he had moved into the small lodging his wife had taken in Queen Street."¹³⁰ The family dynamics were of asylum quality:

Shut up with this uncouth woman who scolded him constantly in her broad Scots, he, the most amiable of men in good company, became irritable too. [I would like to point out that as long as Mad Jack was spending money, drinking, and having a good time, he was in good spirits.] The bickering continued, no doubt intensified by the squalling of the young George Gordon, then nearing his second birthday¹³¹

Mad Jack, hardly a model of behavior himself, wrote to his sister of the great difficulty in living with Mrs.

Byron: "She is very amiable at a distance; but I defy you and all the Apostles to live with her two months, for, if any body could live with her, it was me."¹³²

We can deduce from the above information (and given Catherine's explosive personality) that close proximity to one another, and financial ruin (due to Captain Byron's uncontrolled squandering of Mrs. Byron's inheritance) caused

violent tempers to flare.

Mrs. Byron "could fly into a tantrum when he asked her for money;" this behavior was always countered with "ridiculous displays of affection for her 'Johnny Byron.'" ¹³³ Because of Mrs. Byron's temper, and general psychological state, her parenting style was destructive, to say the least:

The same extremes of uncontrollable anger and demonstrative affection marked her behavior both then and later toward her son, who had a temper equal to his mother's. [When] the captain sought more congenial society...she assuaged her passionate grief by mingled hatred and love of the son who reminded her of him. ¹³⁴

It is important to know the level of violence of which Mrs. Byron was capable. Maurois tells us that "giving way to bursts of temper...the china flew hither and thither across the rooms." ¹³⁵ We can suppose that this hurling of furnishings was an integral part of conflict resolution at the Byron homestead, for the behavior continued until he was at least sixteen years of age, at which time "before the eyes of the stupefied Pigot children, Mrs. Byron hurled the shovel and tongs at her son's head; he left the house, took shelter with his friends, and left for London without seeing her again ." ¹³⁶

Thomas Moore, Byron's devoted friend and first biographer, confirms this view of Mrs. Byron's erratic and violent personality, when he refers to her as "a woman full of the

most passionate extremes, and her grief and affection were bursts as much of temper as of feeling."¹³⁷ In a far less diplomatic way, Peter Quennell aptly and succinctly sums up Byron's mother; as previously stated, but well worth repeating: "Mrs. Byron was coarse, stupid and had a violent temper."¹³⁸

Thomas Moore had much to say on the subject of the effect Mother Byron's violence had on young Byron:

While such was the character of the person [Mrs. Byron] under whose immediate eye his youth was passed, the counteraction which a kind and watchful guardian might have opposed to such example and influence was almost wholly lost to him. Connected but remotely with the family, and never having had any opportunity of knowing the boy, it was with much reluctance that Lord Carlisle originally undertook the trust [when Byron was eleven]; nor can we wonder that, when his duties as a guardian brought him acquainted with Mrs. Byron, he should be deterred from interfering more than was absolutely necessary for the child by his fear of the coming intocollision with the violence and caprice of the mother.¹³⁹

Moore even speculated that things might have been different if the previous lord (the 5th Lord Byron, AKA the "Wicked Lord," from whom Byron received his inheritance) had been someone he could have emulated. Such was not the case, as the Wicked Lord had a few personality problems of his own. According to Moore, the infamous 5th Lord proved to be a role model for young Byron, despite his complete lack of qualifications:

Not only was so fair a stimulus to good conduct wanting, but a rivalry of a very different nature substituted in its place. The strange anecdotes told of the last lord by the country people, among whom his fierce and solitary habits had procured for him a sort of fearful renown, were of a nature lively to arrest the fancy of the young poet, and even to waken in his mind a sort of boyish admiration for singularities which he found thus elevated into matters of wonder and record.¹⁴⁰

With the dearth of healthy role models, and an abusive mother at the helm, we needn't wonder at the effects such an environment would have on a child. Few people could do better than Peter Quennell in appraising the situation and the aftermath:

He [Byron] had never loved his mother—that gross-featured, loud-voiced and ill-mannered woman. Her rages had clouded his childhood; by harping on his lameness she had warped his character; her vulgarity—of royal descent, she was provincial to the core—had played havoc with his adolescent nerves; and yet, after all, she was a part of himself. To no part of his personal background was he wholly insensitive. He might resent her violence; yet in his own composition was a kindred strain.¹⁴¹

CHAPTER FIVE

THE IMPORTANCE OF ATTACHMENT

It has been established that Byron grew up in a hostile, often violent environment, and as mentioned in the previous chapter, most of what we know of Lord Byron's early childhood is based on the most probable outcome given his mother's personality and lifestyle. However, information provided by Thomas Moore (in the previous chapter), makes such an outcome even more probable. In further support of my hypothesis, he stated:

In the few anecdotes of his early life which he related in his 'Memoranda,'... it was not difficult to perceive that the recollections she [his mother] had left behind—at least those that had made the deepest impression—were of a painful nature.¹⁴²

It seems reasonable to conclude that young Byron received little of the tender nurturing that produces a healthy adult. Although there is evidence that Mrs. Byron loved her son, and even "sacrificed her own comfort to give him every advantage her poverty permitted," she simply did not possess the skills, nor the temperament to give her infant what he needed to become an emotionally healthy person."¹⁴³ A parent/child relationship such as this can, and usually does, inhibit the natural attachment (bonding) process so necessary to the development of a healthy infant.

Destructive parent/child dynamics can be altered if healthy interventions take place within a reasonable amount

of time. If no intervention occurs, the child is at great risk for developing an attachment disorder. Unfortunately for Byron, he had no support system; he had to defend himself against the verbal and physical assaults of his mother.

David Shaffer, professor of psychology, in his book, *Social and Personality Development*, speaks voluminously on the importance of attachment (bonding), and has, in fact, devoted two chapters to it. Because of the great bearing this information has on this research, this quote will be presented in its entirety:

Freud repeatedly argued that the emotional events and experiences of infancy can have any number of long-term effects on developing children. In fact, he stressed that the formation of a stable mother/infant emotional bond is absolutely necessary for normal social and personality development, a sentiment shared by ethologist John Bowlby and the best-known [neo] psychoanalytic theorist of recent times, Erik Erikson.

Erikson's view is that secure emotional attachments to care givers provide the infant with a basic sense of trust that will permit him or her to form close affectional ties to other people later in life.

Learning theorists such as Harry Harlow (who studied monkeys) and Robert Sears (who studied people) believe that close contact with a mother figure allows the infant to acquire a repertoire of social skills that will enable him or her to interact effectively and appropriately with other members of the species. In sum, almost everyone agrees that the emotional events of infancy are very influential in shaping one's future development.¹⁴⁴

CURRENT RESEARCH ON ATTACHMENT

According to Stephen Suomi, "behavior can be warped by bonding with a maladroit mom."¹⁴⁵ The moms (or mom substitutes) failed to "provide the stability and sensitivity that make for a secure bond."¹⁴⁶ Following are some of the behaviors displayed by macaques who experienced warped attachment:

These monkeys are anxious and inhibited, and their temperaments are reflected in their reluctance to explore strange objects, their shyness with unfamiliar peers, their low status in monkey communities, and their distress on being separated from their companions.

Some peer-reared monkeys [peers were viewed as mother substitutes, representative of poor mothering behaviors], mostly males, also have self-destructive tendencies toward impulsive behavior and aggression. They're the playground bullies, and they're often shunned by, or even kicked out of, their playgroups.¹⁴⁷

Byron's history clearly shows that he possessed most of the above personality features, at one time or other, as will be shown.

Poor attachment occurs not without its biochemical effects. Suomi has proven that cerebrospinal fluid taken from the impulsive monkeys show that the monkeys "grow up with lower levels of serotonin, a mood-regulating biochemical that has been linked with aggression, antisocial behavior, and depression in human beings."¹⁴⁸ Gunnar has shown that children who experience poor attachment also experience

an almost constant stress response, which wreaks havoc on the body—such as the racing heartbeats, or suppressed immune systems that Suomi sees in his peer-raised monkeys.¹⁴⁹

Although Suoimi worked with lower primates, his findings are not unlike those of Mary Ainsworth, one of the most prominent researchers in [human] infant/parent attachment. Ainsworth answered the question "what happens to human infants who do not bond, or at least not in an adequate way?" She identified three possible major attachment outcomes: secure, resistant, and avoidant, and a variation on resistant, called anxious/resistant.¹⁵⁰ Byron's behaviors seem most in alignment with the resistant categories:

The infants try to stay close to the mother but explore very little when she is present. They become very distressed [if] the mother departs. But when she returns, the infants are ambivalent: they will try to remain near her, although they seem to resent her for having left them, and they are likely to resist physical contact initiated by the mother. Anxious/resistant [a variation] infants are quite wary of strangers, even when their mothers are present.¹⁵¹

There is good reason to believe that Byron's attachment was of the anxious/resistant variety. Although the evidence regarding the infant Byron's various responses to his mother is sketchy, and therefore based on probability, there is hard evidence aplenty that Byron had a continuing approach/avoidance relationship with her, and as he aged he wanted as little contact with his mother as was possible,

and eventually wanted no contact at all. I think it would not be presumptuous to assume that his infancy was far less than happy, or he would not have expressed such hatred and rage for his mother in later years. (Besides, it would not make sense that her violent personality would have been less so during his infancy—and given her circumstances at that time, chances are she was even more violent.) It would be difficult not to conclude that Byron experienced some form of warped attachment.

According to Ainsworth, mothers of anxious/resistant infants "tend to be inconsistent in their care giving; at times they react very enthusiastically to their babies, but their responses to the infant may depend more on their own moods than on the infant's emotional state."¹⁵² This is not at all surprising, as in the previous chapter it was noted that Mrs. Byron displayed "extremes of uncontrollable anger and demonstrative affection" toward her son."¹⁵³

LOOKING FOR ATTACHMENT IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

Maurois stated that "this alternating rhythm of generosity and rage was a dangerous thing to bring into the life of a young creature,"¹⁵⁴ and long before the age of seventeen, Byron recognized that his mother's brand of parenting was the source of his emotional problems. But it was at this age he found the words to express it:

Independent of the moral obligations she
[his mother] is under to protect, cherish,
& instruct her offspring what can

be expected of that mans heart & understanding, who has continually (from childhood to Maturity) beheld so pernicious an Example? His nearest Relation is the first person he is taught to revere, as his Guide & Instructor, the perversion of Temper before him leads to a corruption of his own, and when that is depraved, Vice quickly becomes habitual. And though timely Severity may sometimes be necessary & Justifiable a peevish harassing System of Torment is by no means commendable, & when now & then interrupted by Ridiculous Indulgence, the only purpose answered, is to soften the Feelings for a Moment, which are soon after to be doubly wounded by the Recal [sic] of accustomed Harshness.¹⁵⁵

The milder effects of Byron's attachment problems can be seen in his shyness and dislike of strangers. According to Thomas Moore (1830), Byron had a shy disposition "in his youth-and such as, to a certain degree, it continued all his life."¹⁵⁶ Moore tells us that one of Byron's most intimate and valued friends gave this account of his first meeting with Byron:

The first time I was introduced to him was at a party at his mother's, when he was so shy that she was forced to send for him three times before she could persuade him to come into the drawing-room to play with the young people at a round game. He was a fat bashful boy, with his hair combed straight over his forehead....¹⁵⁷

At age thirteen and one half, when he entered Harrow School, his shyness made him miserable. Says Moore:

The transition from a quiet establishment, like that of Dulwich Grove, to the bustle of a great public school was

sufficiently trying. Accordingly, we find from his own account, that, for the first year and a half, he 'hated Harrow.'¹⁵⁸

Dr. Drury, headmaster of the school stated that Byron had "a degree of shyness [that] hung about him for some time. His manner and temper soon convinced me, that he might be led by a silken string to a point, rather than by a cable."¹⁵⁹ Moore notes that the "sociableness of his nature soon conquered this repugnance; and, from being, as he himself says, 'a most unpopular boy,' he rose at length to be a leader in all the sports, schemes, and mischief of the school."¹⁶⁰

That is not to say that Byron's shyness problem was cured. It seems that Byron's shyness appeared each time he encountered a new situation, as Moore points out:

Though so remarkably shy, when he first went to Southwell, this reserve, as he grew more acquainted with the young people of the place, wore off; till, at length, he became a frequenter of their assemblies and dinner-parties, and even felt mortified if he heard of a rout to which he was not invited.¹⁶¹

Apparently once he slowly warmed up to the other young people, he enjoyed their company; however, the threat of a new face coming upon the scene caused him great emotional turmoil. In a letter to his sister, he wrote: "If you could contrive any way that I may avoid being asked to dinner by Ld. C. I would be obliged to you, as I hate strangers."¹⁶² The actuality of a new face caused a phobic

reaction:

"His horror, however, at new faces still continued; and if while at Mrs. Pigot's [where many of the parties were held] if he saw strangers approaching the house, he would instantly jump out of the window to avoid them.¹⁶³

Moore informs us that Byron's shyness was often mistaken for pride, but that the true reason for the

Haughty distance, at which... he stood apart from his more opulent neighbors, is to be found in his mortifying consciousness of the inadequacy of his own means to his rank, and the proud dread of being made to feel this inferiority by persons to whom, in every other respect, he knew himself superior.¹⁶⁴

Byron's friend Mr. Becher "frequently expostulated with him on this unsociableness."¹⁶⁵ Byron responded, as he did with most of the ideas he pondered—in poetry. This excerpt from that poem was taken from Moore's Biography:

Dear Becher, you tell me to mix with
mankind,—I cannot deny such a precept
is wise;
But retirement accords with the tone of
my mind,
And I will not descend to a world I
despise.

Did the Senaté or Camp my exertions
require,
Ambition might prompt me at once to go
forth;
And, when infancy's years of probation
expire,
Perchance, I may strive to distinguish
my birth.

The fire, in the cavern of Aetna concealed,
Still mantles unseen, in its secret
recess;—

At length, in a volume terrific reveal-
ed,
No torrent can quench it, no bounds can
repress...¹⁶⁶

Despite Byron's title, and his right to it, he was never able to overcome his feelings of inferiority-not unlike Suoimi's low-status monkeys. Also, like Suoimi's monkeys, once he found he could attach himself to some of his peers, he never wanted to let go. Byron spent his whole life trying to attach himself to other people, animals, and even inanimate possessions, in hopes of fulfilling the basic human needs of love and belonging; "for [Byron] to remain long without attaching himself was not in his nature."¹⁶⁷

You would think that Byron would have been doubly damned, first, for his want of a loving parent and home life, second, for the rigid structure of the English system of education that worked against most boys:

One of the most striking results of the English system of education is, that while in no country are there so many instances of manly friendships early formed and steadily maintained, so in no other country, perhaps, are the feelings towards the parental home so early estranged, or at the best, feebly cherished. Transplanted as boys are from the domestic circle, at a time of life when the affections are most disposed to cling, it is but natural that they should seek a substitute for the ties of home in those boyish friendships which they form at school, and which connected as they are with the scenes and events over which youth threw its charm, retain ever after the strongest hold upon their hearts.¹⁶⁸

This school situation was difficult for boys who came from good, or reasonably good homes, but to Byron, it was a place better than home (despite his initial hate for it).

Moore tells us:

To a youth like Byron, abounding with the most passionate feelings, and finding sympathy with only the ruder parts of his nature at home, the little world of school afforded a vent for his affections, which was sure to call them forth in their most ardent form.

Accordingly, the friendships which he contracted both at school and college were little less than what he himself describes them, 'passions.' The want he felt at home of those kindred dispositions, which greeted him among "Ida's social band," is thus strongly described in one of his early poems:

'Is there no cause beyond the common claim,

Endear'd to all in childhood's very name?

Ah! sure some stronger impulse vibrates here,

Which whispers, friendship will be doubly dear

To one who thus for kindred hearts must roam,

And seek abroad the love denied at home:

Those hearts, dear Ida, have I found in thee,

A home, a world, a paradise to me.'¹⁶⁹

FATAL ATTACHMENTS

Byron's first attachments were of an idealized variety.

These early passions were with young girls he became acquainted with, and with whom he fell immediately in love. His first attachment was to Mary Duff, a distant cousin; biographers estimate the date for this event at around 1795. Years later, Byron wrote in his journal:

I recollect all we said to each other, all our caresses, her features, my restlessness, sleeplessness, my tormenting my mother's maid to write for me to herI certainly had no sexual ideas for years afterwards; and yet my misery, my love for that girl were so violent, that I sometimes doubt if I have ever been really attached since....¹⁷⁰

In the summer of 1800, for that was the date of his "first dash into poetry," inspired by the "ebullition of a passion for [his] first Cousin Margaret Parker, who was one of the most beautiful of evanescent beings," he wrote:

My passion had its usual effects upon me: I could not sleep, could not eat; I could not rest; and although I had reason to know that she loved me, it was the torture of my life to think of the time which must elapse before we could meet again.¹⁷¹

Once away at school, Byron's friendships were with boys who were younger—it has been surmised that his own feelings of inferiority prompted such friendship choices. These were not just mere friendships to Byron; in fact, he stated, "My school friendships were with me passions—for I was always violent"¹⁷² An example of this Byronic passion can be found in his comments (from his diary of 1821) concerning his friend E.N. Long: "His friendship, and a violent, though

pure, love and passion—were the then romance of the most romantic part of my life"¹⁷³ And another example:

In 1807 he confided to Elizabeth Pigot that while at Cambridge he had become romantically attached to John Edleston, a choirboy at Trinity Chapel. 'His voice first attracted my attention, his countenance fixed it, and his manners attached me to him for ever.... I certainly love him more than any human being, and neither time nor distance have had the least effect on my (in general) changeable disposition.'¹⁷⁴

Young Edleston presented Byron with a gift, a cornelian heart. And of course, Byron could not help but respond in poetry, the medium through which he dealt with, and attempted to clarify, all aspects of his life:

No specious splendour of this stone
Endears it to my memory ever;
With lustre only once it shone,
And blushes modest as the giver.

Some who can sneer at friendship's ties,
Have, for my weakness, oft reproved me;
Yet still the simple gift I prize,
For I am sure the giver loved me.

He offer'd it with downcast look,
As fearful that I might refuse it;
I told him when the gift I took,
My only fear should be to lose it.¹⁷⁵

The problem with so needy a mind as Lord Byron's was that no form of friendship could completely fill the void; no one could return the same violent kind of passion that was part and parcel of Byron's emotional wiring:

He was continually tormented by fierce and jealous friendships. The favoured friend now was young Delawarr, 'almost too beautiful for a boy' Delawarr

[and his other friends as well] did not have so exalted a notion of friendship as Byron. The latter was ready to give his life, to sacrifice everything for his friends, and it amazed him to find that other people's sentiments were so weakly and so lukewarm.¹⁷⁶

As was his way, Byron's feelings came out in poetry:

In thee I fondly hoped to clasp
A friend whom death alone could sever;
Till envy with malignant grasp,
Detach'd thee from my heart for ever.¹⁷⁷

And this poem from another day also expresses his deep feelings:

You knew that my soul, that my heart, my
existence

If danger demanded, were wholly your
own;

You knew me unalter'd by years or by
distance,

Devoted to love and to friendship
alone.¹⁷⁸

Despite the fact that Byron had many true friends, he often felt friendless, as they could not respond in kind—they simply were not equipped with the fiery passion that filled his mind and soul. On June 26, 1809, Byron and Hobhouse (a most devoted friend) departed on a voyage (from which grew Childe Harold's Pilgrimage). His friend and publisher Murray traveled a short distance with them. Byron's faithful valet Fletcher was also in attendance. Even though traveling in such good company, Byron still experienced an emptiness that prompted him to bring on board

a farmer's son (Robert Rushton) "to whom Byron took a fancy 'because, like [himself] he seem[ed] a friendless animal.'" ¹⁷⁹

It appears that Byron spent his whole life trying to attach himself to someone, or something, perhaps in an attempt to feel what he could not feel—perhaps a calm, deep and secure friendship beyond his violent passion. But he had not the emotional equipment to form a link. It is possible that he viewed his own volcanic responses to friendship the proof of true friendship—after all, his mother claimed to love him, yet she was entirely violent. He was the nursling of destructive passion and violence.

It may be that any real security he felt, did not come from his friendships, but was provided by his menagerie of animals and inanimate objects that he gathered around him. Quennell (1951) believes that:

It pleased him to live surrounded by dependent creatures: and to this trait, rather than to any genuine love of animals (though he had appreciated the companionship of several enormous and devoted dogs) may perhaps be attributed the weakness for forming menageries which added so much to the discomfort and confusion of his domestic background. ¹⁸⁰

The following account of Byron's "astonishing menagerie" that was maintained at the Palazzo Guiccioli, was given by Shelley, while wandering about Byron's quarters:

Lord B's establishment consists...of ten horses, eight enormous dogs, three

monkeys, five cats, an eagle, a crow, and a falcon; and all these, except the horses, walk about the house, which every now and then resounds with their unarbitrated quarrels, as if they were the masters of it.¹⁸¹

Later in Byron's "Circean Palace," he reported: "I have just met on the grand staircase five peacocks, two guinea hens, and an Egyptian crane."¹⁸² (While a young man at Cambridge, he kept a chained bear in his room. During his travels, the bear was left in the care of his mother at Newstead.)

While in Greece, Byron's menagerie was of a wholly different order:

His house was filled with soldiers; his receiving room resembled an arsenal of war, rather than the habitation of a poet. Its walls were decorated with swords, pistols, Turkish sabres, dirks, rifles, guns, blunderbusses, bayonets, helmets, and trumpets...and attacks, surprises, charges, ambuscades, battles, sieges, were almost the only topics of his conversation with the different capitani.¹⁸³

It seems probable that the unusual attachments that Byron continuously formed (consciously or otherwise) were attempts at fulfilling some deep emotional hunger—whether with people well below his station, or animals, they needed him, and depended on him for their care. To be sure, such creatures would not question his ability to display real love, or even notice that he most likely did not know what real love was. Perhaps he felt like less of an emotional

failure surrounded by his menagerie. Even his inanimate treasures must have provided some kind of comfort for him. He once told his friend Lady Melbourne, "I could love anything on earth that appeared to wish it."¹⁸⁴ That statement, of course, was based on an inadequate definition of love.

We can only imagine the emotional needs that would have prompted such unnatural attachment formation. Quite obviously, warped attachment had a devastating effect on Byron, but Mrs. Byron's rage added another dimension not covered by Ainsworth's attachment theory. First of all, the effects of anxious/resistant bonding would most likely have been an extreme form. Secondly, the violent aspect of her nature, combined with other abuses, would have inflicted emotional damage severe enough to result in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.

DIAGNOSIS AND MISDIAGNOSIS

Before getting into the criteria for this disabling illness, I would like to present some salient research that has great bearing on my hypothesis. Current research in psychiatry, psychology, and medicine has shown that the full effects of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder may not be experienced for years or even decades after the abuse. Shannon et al, (1994) reports:

There has long been an awareness among researchers and clinicians that stress and trauma can have a severe impact on children and adolescents. A number of theorists have suggested that childhood

trauma may account for some of the variability in the presence and degree of psychiatric disorders in adulthood. However, it has only been in the past decade that investigators have increasingly recognized that as an immediate effect of severe trauma in childhood, children may develop Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.¹⁸⁵

The real problem lies with clinicians who have been unfamiliar with survivor-victim syndromes. The result of that unfamiliarity has been:

Inappropriate use of institutionalization or countertherapeutic use of psychopharmacological intervention. Misdiagnosis often occurs as a result of failure to make connections between events that happened years ago (in the case of an adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse) with present symptoms. This may result in blaming the victim and focusing on present symptomatology as representing character defects.¹⁸⁶

As mentioned in Chapter One, most attempts to analyze Byron have resulted in a Bipolar diagnosis. I can only assume that this error has occurred because diagnosticians have failed to rule out disorders whose roots may stem from childhood trauma. Support for this theory is also to be found in a public information paper published by the American Psychiatric Association:

In people whose trauma occurred years or even decades before, the professionals who treat them must pay close attention to the behaviors—often deeply entrenched—which the PTSD sufferer has evolved to cope with his or her symptoms. Many people whose trauma happened long ago have suffered in silence with PTSD's symptoms without ever having been

able to talk about the trauma or their nightmares, hyperarousal, numbing, or irritability. During treatment, being able to talk about what has happened and making the connection between past trauma and current symptoms provides people with the increased sense of control the need to manage their current lives and have meaningful relationships.¹⁸⁷

AND YET MORE EVIDENCE

If further evidence is needed that what happens in childhood can have lifelong effects, The Journal of the American Medical Association (May 1997), featured the results of a recent study on women with a history of child abuse. "The study confirms that previous childhood or sexual abuse is associated with adult physical complaints, psychological distress, substance abuse, suicide attempts, and suicide ideation even when women have not suffered additional abuse in adulthood."¹⁸⁸

Although the above mentioned study was on women, apparently the sex of the abused person seems not to matter. Information from a paper entitled Sexual Abuse of Males: Prevalence, Lasting Effects, and Resources, lists the same affects (and more), and these affects have been corroborated by seven different sets of researchers.¹⁸⁹ A close look at the DSM IV guidelines should reveal any apparent relationships between Byron's environmental experience, and the development of the disorder. In Chapter Six, I will discuss

all aspects of PTSD, using the descriptors set forth in the

DSM-IV.

CHAPTER SIX

DIAGNOSTIC CRITERIA FOR POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER:

CRITERION A

In order to arrive at a diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, Criterion A, states that the person must have experienced a traumatic event in which both of the following were present:

1. The person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others.

2. The person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror.

Note: In children this may be expressed instead by disorganized or agitated behavior.¹⁹⁰ The DSM-IV defines the traumatic events to which item one refers, as those that are experienced directly, and include, but are not limited to: military combat, violent personal assault (sexual assault, physical attack, robbery, mugging), being kidnapped, being taken hostage, terrorist attack, torture, incarceration as a prisoner of war or in a concentration camp, natural or manmade disasters, severe automobile accidents, or being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. For children, sexually traumatic events may include developmentally inappropriate sexual experiences without threatened or actual violence or injury.¹⁹¹

The Harvard Mental Health Letter (February 1991), provides further information on PTSD; it states: "a trauma is an event that is outside the range of usual human

experience and would be seriously distressing for almost anyone." The Health Letter clarifies and expands on the parameters for Item 2, Criterion A:

The post-traumatic stress response has been mostly thoroughly studied in soldiers, but it may turn out that the heaviest and most lasting burden falls on abused children and women.... For a child who is repeatedly abused physically or sexually, the stress is constant and the threat is always present. The abuser becomes the most powerful person in the victim's life, using isolation and terror like a captor with a hostage.

In certain famous cases, hostages have come to love their captors; abused children already love theirs. Monkey infants cling to dummy "mothers" (provided with nipples that supply milk) even more tightly when they are subjected to blasts of cold air that seem to come from the dummies. Abused children develop a similar desperate need for intimacy and intense fear of abandonment. They cling to their parents because they have no other refuge; the source of terror is also the only source of comfort.¹⁹²

I feel certain that Byron was expressing exactly this kind of desperate need for intimacy in all of the warped attachments he attempted to form with young boys, inanimate objects, animals, and as he grew older, young men. He could not cling to his mother, so he clung to the nearest object of attachment. It is here we see the convergence of attachment disorder, and PTSD.

Having defined the environmental circumstances that can result in PTSD, I will now discuss Item two, the reactive

aspect of the disorder. Children suffering from PTSD often display a different set of behaviors than do adults, such as agitated or disorganized behavior. (However, they are still capable of displaying the intense fear, helplessness, and horror, as mentioned in the descriptors.) The Harvard Mental Health Letter enlarges on that behavior: "Some children, especially boys, protect themselves against feelings of passivity and helplessness by aggression, even provoking the abusive parent to control the timing and intensity of the beatings."¹⁹³

I believe the psychological and sociological data, upon which this paper is based, makes it clear that Byron was emotionally and physically abused by his mother. The following information, provided by Thomas Moore, should stand as further evidence:

When he [Byron] perceived a storm was at hand, in flight lay his only safe resource. To this summary expedient he was driven, at the period of which we are speaking; but not till after a scene had taken place between him and Mrs. Byron, in which the violence of her temper had proceeded to lengths, that, however outrageous they may be deemed, were not, it appears, unusual with her.

The poet, Young, in describing a temper of this sort, says-

'The cups and saucers, in a whirlwind sent
Just intimate the lady's discontent.'¹⁹⁴

Leslie Marchand verifies the need for Byron's hasty departure to safety: "Quarrels with his mother were inevi-

table. He escaped as often as he could across the green to the Pigots, where he had made a fast friend of Elizabeth's brother John"¹⁹⁵

In his biography, Moore defines for us Mrs. Byron's weapons of choice:

But poker and tongs were, it seems, the missiles which Mrs. Byron preferred, and which she, more than once, sent resounding after her fugitive son. In the present instance, he was but just in time to avoid a blow aimed at him with the former of these weapons, and to make a hasty escape to the house of a friend in the neighbourhood.¹⁹⁶

Commenting on the frequency of the missiles Mrs. Byron launched at young Byron, Marchand states:

The chronological vagueness of the early accounts of Byron's childhood has left the impression that his mother habitually threw the fire tongs at her son's head or broke dishes over it. But most of these spectacular performances belong to the period of his obstreperous youth in England.¹⁹⁷

There is obviously some disagreement about the age at which the aforementioned missiles were thrown at, or broken over, Byron's head. At any age, it is abuse, and meets the diagnostic requirements for Criterion A, Item 1.

In order to verify the second item in Criterion A, two questions must be answered: Did Byron display disorganized or agitated behavior, and did he respond to his situation with aggression, as explained in the Harvard Mental Health Letter?¹⁹⁸ I believe these questions can be answered by

using some examples of Byron's childhood behavior as a gauge. Following are some descriptions of Byron's early behavior that managed to get recorded—we can only imagine the occurrences that did not make their way into someone's biography. Thomas Moore (as well as many other biographers) reports the following incidents:

As a child, that his temper was violent, or rather sullenly passionate, is certain. Even when in petticoats, he showed the same uncontrollable spirit with his nurse, which he afterwards exhibited, when an author, with his critics. Being angrily reprimanded by her, one day, for having soiled or torn a new frock in which he had been just dressed, he got into one of his 'silent rages' (as he himself has described them), seized the frock with both his hands, rent it from top to bottom, and stood in sullen stillness, setting his censurer and her wrath at defiance.¹⁹⁹

Byron relates another classic instance of the behavior he displayed while in one of his severely agitated states:

In all other respects, I differed not at all from other children, being neither tall nor short, dull nor witty, of my age, but rather lively—except in my sullen moods, and then I was always a Devil. They once (in one of my silent rages) wrenched a knife from me, which I had snatched from [the] table at Mrs. B.'s dinner (I always dined earlier), and applied to my breast.²⁰⁰

Moore also provides insight to the hostile parenting that Byron was exposed to, when he points out that Byron learned much of his behavior from his mother:

But notwithstanding this, and other such unruly outbreaks—in which he [Byron]

was but too much encouraged by the example of this mother, who frequently, it is said, proceeded to the same extremities with her caps, gowns & c [sic].²⁰¹

Moore's next example of young Byron's rage does much to make clear the intensity of that rage. He states that "in a fit of passion bit a large piece out of a china saucer." Such violent behaviors, displayed at such an early age, serve as indicators that the abusive and hostile situation had gone on since he was very young.²⁰²

As a child, Byron had no way of escaping from this violent captor, and the years of abuse took their toll on his malleable, young mind. As he grew toward adolescence and young manhood, the mother-induced malignant bile that filled his soul since childhood began to seep out a few words at a time, and when the pressure became too great, he exploded in violent volumes, to the one person in whom he could confide—his half-sister, Augusta.

At the age of seventeen, to her, he unleashed his pent-up rage for his mother's abuse in letter after letter. Though the letters are lengthy, nevertheless, they will be presented in their entirety, so that the full magnitude of his rage can be experienced. To Augusta, he wrote:

I assure you upon my *honour*, jesting apart, I have never been so *scur-
rilously*, and *violently* abused by any person, as by that woman, whom I think I am to call mother, by that being who gave me birth, to whom I ought to look up with veneration and respect, but whom I am sorry I cannot love or admire.

Within one little hour, I have not only heard myself, but have heard my *whole family*, by the father's side, stigmatized in terms that the blackest malevolence would perhaps shrink from, and that too in words you would be shocked to hear. Such Augusta, such is my mother; my mother! I disclaim her from this time, and although I cannot help treating her with respect, I cannot reverence, as I ought to do, that parent who by her outrageous conduct forfeits all title to filial affection. To you, Augusta, I must look up, as my nearest relation, to you I must confide what I cannot mention to others, and I am sure you will pity me; but I entreat you to keep this a secret, nor expose that unhappy failing of this woman, which I must bear with patience. I would be very sorry to have it discovered....²⁰³

This letter, dated 11, November, 1804, was written while he was at Harrow On the Hill. And he will not soon run out of vehemence:

But I am now coming to what must shock you as much as it does me, when she [Mrs. Byron] has occasion to lecture me (not very seldom you will think no doubt) she does not do it in a manner that commands respect, and in an impressive style. No. Did she do that I should amend my faults with pleasure, and dread to offend a kind though just mother. But she flies into a fit of phrenzy [sic] upbraids me as if I was the most undutiful wretch in existence, rakes up the ashes of my father, abuses him, says I shall be a true Byrrone, which is the worst epithet she can invent. Am I to call this woman mother? Because by nature's law she has authority over me, am I to be trampled upon in this manner? Am I to be goaded with insult, loaded with obloquy, and suffer my feelings to be outraged on the most trivial occasions? I owe her respect as a Son, but I renounce her as a Friend.

What an example does she show me?
I hope in God I shall never follow it.
I have not told you all nor can I, I
respect you as a female, nor although I
ought to confide in you as a Sister,
will I shock you with a repetition of
scenes, which you may judge of by the
Sample I have given you, and which to
all but you are buried in oblivion.
Would they were so in my mind. I am
afraid they never will. And can I, my
dear Sister, look up to this mother,
with that respect, that affection I
ought. Am I to be eternally subjected
to her caprice! I hope not, indeed a
few short years will emancipate me from
the Shackles I now wear, and then per-
haps she will govern her passion better
than at present...I am in great hopes
that at Christmas I shall be with Mr.
Hanson during the vacation, I shall do
all I can to avoid a visit to my mother
wherever she is. It is the first duty
of a parent, to impress precepts of
obedience in their children, but her
method is so violent, so capricious,
that the patience of Job, the versatil-
ity of a member of the House of Commons
could not support it. I revere Dr.
Drury [a teacher] much more than I do
her, yet he is never violent, never out-
rageous, I dread offending him, not
however through fear, but the respect I
bear him, makes me unhappy when I am
under his displeasure. My mother's
precepts, never convey instructions,
never fix upon my mind, to be sure they
are calculated, to inculcate obedience,
so are chains, and tortures, but though
they may restrain for a time the mind
revolts from such treatment.²⁰⁴

Byron had not yet run out of steam. His mother obvi-
ously supplied him with sufficient fuel so that his rage
would burn for many long years. In yet another letter, he
states that:

My mother you inform me commends my

amiable disposition and good understanding, if she does this to you it is a great deal more than I ever hear myself, for the one or the other is always found fault with, and I am told to copy the excellent pattern which I see before me in herself....But her conduct is so strange, her caprices so impossible to be complied with, her passions so outrageous, that the evil quite overbalances her agreeable qualities.²⁰⁵

In a letter to John Hanson (his mother's attorney), Byron explains how he made his final escape from his mother, and once again, comments on her abusiveness:

Mrs. Byron and myself are now totally separated, injured by her, I sought refuge with Strangers, too late I see my error, for how was kindness to be expected from others, when denied by a parent.²⁰⁶

While Byron was attending Harrow School, an incident occurred which was so distressing to him, that he actually invoked his mother's aid, in responding to the proper authorities. (He was extremely harshly reprimanded for talking in church.) At the end of his pleading letter he said, "If you love me, you will now show it."²⁰⁷ He was fifteen years old when he wrote that letter. What a long time to wait, in hopes of having one's mother express some form of love.

In a letter to Augusta, dated March 22, 1804, (written at the age of sixteen), Byron revealed his deep need for someone to love and with whom to have an emotional attachment—the type of attachment that had been denied to him his

entire young life:

I hope you will consider me not only as a Brother but as your warmest and most affectionate Friend, and if ever circumstances require it your protector. Recollect, My Dearest Sister, that you are the nearest relation I have in the world both by the ties of Blood and affection.... Write to me soon, my Dear Augusta, And do not forget to love me, In the meantime, I remain, more than words can express, your ever sincere, affectionate Brother and Friend,
Byron.²⁰⁸

I find the previous letter to his sister of particular interest, as in it Byron was able to express so much warmth and love. I believe this suggests, that at sixteen, Byron was not yet fully aware of the extent of the psychological damage he had experienced as a result of his abusive upbringing. At that age, he presumed he possessed the ability to love, and share a normal relationship with a woman—for he did express love, at least to his half-sister. As history has shown, he had a very difficult time forming healthy relationships with women—and the relationship with his sister was contorted into an incestuous one. (Of some sociological and psychological importance is the fact that Byron and his half-sister shared the same father, and were not raised together, hence did not experience a brother/sister relationship at a young age.)

In the final line of the next letter, we get gain a real understanding of the black rage that Byron is feeling. Away from school, and forced to visit with his mother, Byron

is beside himself with hate and anger, which he once again offloads on Augusta:

... I can send nothing to amuse you, excepting a repetition of my complaints against my tormentor, whose diabolical disposition... seems to increase with age, and to acquire new force with Time. The more I see of her the more my dislike augments; nor can I so entirely conquer the appearance of it, as to prevent her from perceiving my opinion; this, so far from calming the Gale, blows it into a hurricane, which threatens to destroy everything, till exhausted by its own violence, it is lulled into a sullen torpor, which, after a short period, is again roused into fresh and renewed phrenzy, to me most terrible, and to every other Spectator astonishing....In this society, ...have I dragged out a weary fortnight, and am condemned to pass another or three weeks...No captive Negro, or Prisoner of war, ever looked forward to their emancipation, and return to Liberty with more Joy, and with more lingering expectation, than I do to my escape from this maternal bondage, and this accursed place... I wander about hating everything I behold, and if I remained here a few months longer, I should become, what with envy, spleen and all uncharitableness, a complete misanthrope....²⁰⁹

FURTHER DAMAGE

The abuse received at the hands of his mother was not the only abuse that qualified Byron for Criterion A, Item 1:

"Mrs. Byron's first and only offspring came into the world with a physical handicap that caused him much bodily suffering and mental agony, and that did more to shape his character than it will ever be possible to calculate."²¹⁰

Byron was born with a clubbed foot; "George's foot

turns inward, and it is the right foot; he walks quite on the side of his foot," stated Mrs. Byron in a letter to an in-law.²¹¹

As a result of his deformity, young George underwent some of the most torturous treatments eighteenth century quacks could devise. In a fruitless attempt to rectify the deformity, young Byron was placed in the care of a "practitioner," who called himself a surgeon, one Dr. Lavendar. Lavendar "apparently tried to straighten the boy's foot by rubbing it with oil and screwing it up in a machine that gave the patient excruciating pain."²¹²

The job of caring for the foot was turned over to Agnes Gray, "a pious Bible-reading Presbyterian maid," who barged the child with hellfire and brimstone sermons.²¹³

Byron suffered immeasurable physical pain as a result of these unorthodox treatments, yet he displayed a bravery far beyond his years. At this time, Byron's tutor was Mr. Drummer Rogers. Mr. Rogers, seeing the agony in Byron's face, remarked, "It makes me uncomfortable my lord, to see you sitting there in such pain as I know you must be suffering." "Never mind, Mr. Rogers," said the boy, "you shall not see any signs of it in me."²¹⁴

The treatments alone seem torture enough to induce Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.

Most unfortunately, Dr. Lavendar's treatment was not the last of the abuse that Byron was to suffer. May Gray

(sister of Agnes, Byron's first nurse), took over the task of "caring" for Byron's foot, and seeing to his general welfare. During the times when she was putting on the machines or the bandages, she would tell him Biblical stories, or have him recite the Psalms. Even as a young child, he had quite a good knowledge of the Bible. And, as will be shown, the circumstances under which he was tutored added much to his psychological disturbances:

Under the tutelage of Agnes and May Gray, Byron had come to know and like the poetry of the Psalms. And with [them] he had read with some thoroughness the books of the Bible. 'I am a great reader and admirer of those books,' he later wrote John Murray, 'and had read them through and through before I was eight years old,—that is to say, the Old Testament, for the New struck me as a task, but the other as a pleasure.²¹⁵

By all accounts, May Gray, (like her sister Agnes, before her), was a hellfire and brimstone sort, as well. And May, as it turns out, was a hypocrite of the greatest degree. For she used to sneak out at night leaving young Byron alone, so that she could go carousing with her male friends. Maurois's dramatic recreation of the atmosphere in which Byron received his care is chilling in a Syble-like way:

May Gray often spoke of Satan. She liked to frighten you. She used to tell terrifying ghost-stories, and said the house was haunted. At night when she was rolling those vexatiously tight bandages round his ailing little heel,

she made him repeat Psalms...and May Gray snuffed the candle. She had orders to stay near the child in the next room, but he knew that she went out. When she had gone, he was frightened.

All Scotland seemed full of ghosts, the house was close to a graveyard, and then there was that awful Satan, and the Lord. In the darkness the child could feel evil things prowling about him. He crept along the corridor to a window, from which he could see a light, and there he remained until the cold forced him back to bed.²¹⁶

THE TRAUMA OF PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE

So far the evidence is exceedingly strong that the sociological and psychological events in Byron's childhood were sufficient to have caused severe attachment problems, as well as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Unfortunately, it gets far worse. As mentioned earlier, there is good evidence his nursemaid, May Gray, was guilty, not only of her own brand of physical and emotional abuse, but of sexual abuse, as well. When she would go carousing at night, leaving young Byron alone, (when Byron's mother was out of town), she would bring her male friends back to the Byron household, for the purpose of engaging in sexual activities.

At the tender age of nine, Byron was sexually abused by May, a fact revealed by Byron to his mother's attorney, Hanson. Hanson never revealed this fact to Mrs. Byron. Giving her a partial report, he mentioned only the physical abuse that the child was receiving at the hands of his nursemaid. He told her that May Gray "was perpetually

beating him, and that his bones sometimes ached from it; [and] that she brought all sorts of company of the very lowest description into his apartments."²¹⁷

It was not until Byron's death, that Hanson revealed to Byron's friend Hobhouse the rest of the statement withheld from Mrs. Byron: "a free Scotch girl used to come to bed with him and play tricks with his person."²¹⁸ Marchand speculates that "If Byron was nine years old when this sex play began, it must have started in Scotland and gone on for some time before he revealed it to Hanson."²¹⁹

Most Byron scholars agree that Byron was "obviously referring to this period of his boyhood when he wrote in 'Detached Thoughts' in 1821: 'My passions were developed very early—so early, that few would believe me, if I were to state the period, and the facts which accompanied it.'"²²⁰ I believe few would question the remembrances that prompted Byron to state that "he had begun to squander his capitol before he had reached an age when he could gather in the interest."²²¹

Marchand made an interesting speculation in regard to the sexual and physical abuse:

The worst blows he suffered at the hands of May Gray were psychological rather than physical [despite the fact that young Byron's bones ached from the beatings]. The disillusioning experience of seeing her devote her caresses to others [the men she brought home with her] after their intimacy may well have roused a maddened jealousy that caused

the boy to tell Hanson.²²²

I feel certain that Marchand is correct in concluding that the psychological abuse Byron suffered at the hands of May Gray was greater than the physical abuse. And most certainly Byron would have experienced the kind of disillusionment defined by Marchand. Despite the psychological impact caused by the disillusionment, I find it difficult to believe that the emotional consequences would have been worse than those caused by the sexual abuse. Children simply have no way of dealing with adult sexual behavior.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), states that:

No child is psychologically prepared to cope with repeated sexual stimulation. Even a two or three year old, who cannot know the sexual activity is 'wrong,' will develop problems resulting from the inability to cope with the over-stimulation.

The child of five or older who knows and cares for the abuser becomes trapped between affection or loyalty for the person, and the sense that the sexual activities are terribly wrong.²²³

This situation sets the child up for what is known as betrayal trauma. According to Dr. David Baldwin:

Although the mechanisms of this connection to traumatic symptoms are not well understood, it appears that betrayal by someone on whom you depend for survival (as a child on a parent) may produce consequences similar to those from more obviously life-threatening traumas.²²⁴

In Byron's case, he depended on May Gray for his care,

and he should have been able to depend on his mother to protect him from the likes of May Gray. It seems feasible that part of the hate and rage Byron felt toward his mother was due to her failure to protect him from abuse beyond what he was already receiving from her.

Although I disagree with Marchand on the perspective he took on Byron's sexual abuse, I do believe he hit the mark with his comments on the hypocritical aspect of May Gray's behavior:

This [sexual] experience with an apparently pious girl who taught him to read the Bible may have been an additional shock and in part the foundation of his lifelong hatred of cant and hypocrisy in religious people.²²⁵

AND YET MORE SEXUAL ABUSE

The dismissal of May Gray, brought an end to the beatings and the sexual abuse inflicted by her. Unfortunately, Byron became the victim of more sexual abuse, at the hands of Lord Grey de Ruthyn. Byron's estate, Newstead Abbey, was necessarily leased to Lord Grey, "a spoiled boy eight years older than Byron."²²⁶ Lord Grey befriended Byron, taking him on moonlight rides to shoot pheasants, and allowing him to stay at the Abbey. During that time, something of a sexual nature occurred. And although Byron (aged 16) "would never reveal the nature of the offense, he hinted at it clearly enough to make it obvious that the sensuous young lord had made some kind of sexual advance which disgusted his younger

companion."²²⁷

Newstead Abbey had been "let for five years to Lord Grey de Ruthyn, a young nobleman of twenty-three."²²⁸ During this time, Byron often stayed at Newstead with Lord Grey, and developed a what he presumed to be a good friendship. However:

For grave and mysterious reasons which, with a stubborn bashfulness, he refused to reveal either to his mother or to Hanson. The rift made it impossible for him ever to return to Newstead; he could not now remain in the same room as Lord Grey, and when the latter entered the house, Byron went out of it.²²⁹

Henceforth, Byron's referred to Lord Grey as his "inveterate enemy." To his sister Augusta he wrote:

I am not reconciled to Lord Grey, and I never will. He was once my *Greatest Friend*, my reasons for ceasing that Friendship are such as I cannot explain, not even to you, my Dear Sister, (although were they to be made known to any body, you would be the first,) but they will ever remain hidden in my own breast.

They are Good ones, however, for although I am *violent* I am not *capricious* in my *attachments*. My mother disapproves of my quarreling with him, but if she knew the cause (which she never will know) She would reproach me no more. He Has forfeited all *title to my esteem*, but I hold him in too much *contempt* ever to hate him.²³⁰

Byron's friend, Hobhouse, "noted in the margin of his copy of Moore's Life [of Byron] '... a circumstance occurred during [this] intimacy which certainly had much effect on

his future morals.'"²³¹ (One need only to review Byron's sexual exploits, in Italy, Greece, and Turkey, mentioned in Chapter 2, to understand Hobhouse's meaning.) Byron's absolute unwillingness to speak about the incident (with the exception of his one comment to Hanson—and that may have been prompted by May Gray's physical abuse), is a very normal, and common response to a very abnormal situation.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry reports that "child sexual abuse has been reported up to 80,000 times a year, but the number of unreported instances is far greater, because the children are afraid to tell anyone what has happened."²³² And it appears this was also true of Lord Byron. Regarding the trauma associated with PTSD, information from the American Psychiatric Association states that "many people whose trauma happened long ago have suffered in silence with PTSD'S symptoms without ever having been able to talk about the trauma or their nightmares, hyperarousal, numbing, or irritability."²³³

Recall, that Byron poured his heart out to his sister, when writing of his mother's abuse—to be sure, this was a very cathartic experience for him. He did not do the same with his sexual abuse. He made no mention to her of his experiences with May Gray, and only intimated what had occurred with Lord Grey. True to the behavior pattern of most sexually abused children, Byron was either too ashamed, or too frightened to talk about it.

CRITERION B

Criterion B deals with the reexperiencing (in some way) the events surrounding the original trauma. There are five items in Section B; however, the DSM-IV does not require that each of these items be experienced, rather it states that experiencing "one or more" is sufficient for a diagnosis. Item one is as follows:

1. recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perception.

Note: In young children, repetitive play may occur in which themes or aspects of the trauma are expressed.²³⁴

Anyone who has read Byron's letters to his sister, would have a difficult time denying that his expressions of pain and anguish were like a symbolic projectile vomiting of the hate and rage that had been playing over and over in his head. If somehow he had been able to relieve the psychological pressure at an earlier time in his life, the letters to his sister would most likely not have been so venomous. It does not take a psychologist to realize that Byron had carried that emotional build-up for a long time.

Section B, Item 2, states the recurrence of the trauma is experienced through dreams:

Recurrent distressing dreams of the event. **Note:** In young children, there may be frightening dreams without recognizable content.²³⁵

It wasn't until Byron married Annabella that the world

gained knowledge of his sleep disturbances. (Recall from Chapter 2, that he did not like sleeping with women—that is, spending the entire night in the same bed—therefore, it would be difficult for anyone to gain such information.) Marchand, in speaking of an incident that occurred early in the marriage, tells us:

His [Byron's] moments of tenderness could not dispel the anxiety she felt when he had disturbing nightmares and rose from his bed to roam the gallery armed with a dagger and pistol as if awaiting some attack. One night, she recalled, he came back to her exhausted and haggard.²³⁶

Marchand mentions another episode of disturbed sleep (in the same time-frame as the last), which was quite possibly preceded by nightmares. He states that Byron, "tensed by anxieties, became the victim again of sleepless nights and nervous fears such as had caused him to walk the floor in the dead of night with his pistols during the honeymoon."²³⁷

I suspect that Byron would have preferred to keep his sleep disturbances to himself, for fear of the psychological implications people might draw. However, on occasion, a clue was dropped here and there. In his journal of November 23, 1814, he states, "No dreams last night of the dead, nor the living; so—I am 'firm as the marble, founded as the rock,' till the next earthquake."²³⁸ And to Thomas Moore, (Nov. 30, 1813), he wrote, "All convulsions end with me in

rhyme; and to solace my midnights, I have scribbled another Turkish story...."²³⁹

At this point, I would like to interject a reminder; the DSM-IV requires that the traumatic event be reexperienced in one or more ways. Byron's behavior has already met the guidelines for two of those descriptors. There are subtle indicators that he also displayed behavior that would meet with Section B, Item 3, which is as follows:

acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (includes a sense of reliving the experience, illusions, hallucinations, and dissociative flashback episodes, including those that occur on awakening or when intoxicated).
Note: In young children, trauma-specific reenactment may occur.²⁴⁰

Thanks to the fact that Annabella was a brilliant woman, and "could analyze his weaknesses very well," we have some inside information about Byron's internal functioning.²⁴¹ An event occurred during their honeymoon, that sounds frightfully like Byron was caught up in reliving a traumatic experience:

She [Annabella] remembered with most pleasure his 'child-side,' when he would speak of himself in the third person as 'B.' But 'after a few minutes it often happened that some careless word of his own would strike some painful chord, and then the man's mind returned with all its wretchedness. He would say 'B's a fool'- 'Yes, he is a fool,' bitterly-or 'poor B-poor B'.²⁴²

Notice also, that Annabella stated that "it often happened, indicating frequency." (I would like to note that

Annabella's insights from early in the marriage are much more reliable than those toward the end, as later observations were filtered through her own anger.)

The above mentioned quote from Annabella makes it sound as though Byron's mind had wandered into its innermost hell, and he was responding piteously and mindlessly to what he was reexperiencing there. His depth of pain seems not unlike that of Joseph Conrad's character, Kurtz, in *Heart of Darkness*— "The horror, the horror."²⁴³

The next criterion, Section B, Item 4, may contain the most important diagnostic information, for it is on this point that the popular Bipolar diagnosis is separated from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. The DSM-IV states that the person experiences:

intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.²⁴⁴

Data from the American Psychiatric Association explains the behavior involved in this criterion:

At times, the re-experience comes as a sudden, painful onslaught of emotions that seem to have no cause. The emotions are often of grief that brings tears, fear or anger. Individuals say these emotional experiences occur repeatedly, much like memories or dreams about the traumatic event.²⁴⁵

Consider these words that Byron wrote to his friend Hobhouse, while in just such a frame of mind:

I am so bilious, that I nearly lose my

head, and so nervous that I cry for nothing.... I have had no particular cause of griefs, except the usual accompaniments of all unlawful passions.... I have neither the strength of mind to break my chain, nor the insensibility which would deaden its weight.²⁴⁶

Sometimes, Byron's extreme emotional distress seemed directly related to environmental cues that symbolized some aspect of the original trauma. On other occasions, it would have been difficult to identify the cause. And it was most probably these emotional outbursts that prompted other researchers to label him Bipolar. If the source of these behaviors was not obvious (and they would not be, without an in depth study), one could easily assume that they were the violent eruptions of a Bipolar individual.

To find the root of Byron's behavior, it is necessary to go back to the primary source of his misery, his mother. From Byron's birth, to age sixteen, Byron's view of affection, parenting, and how the world received him in general, was formed by a woman whose main talent was violent verbal assault, and eventually physical assault. Her two favored topics were Byron's character, and her financial distress. Recall, that Mad Jack squandered her fortune, and "she was ruined, reduced even to penury."²⁴⁷ It is not likely that Byron would deal well—if at all—with a wife "who could analyze his weaknesses very well;" nor is it likely that he would deal well with financial distress—and more particularly his wife's input on his financial distress.²⁴⁸

Both of these situations would have been much too reminiscent of his lifetime of trauma with his mother. Adding to the trauma of his fatal marriage was the fact that the bond he formed with Annabella was the only kind he knew how to form—warped. With these negative dynamics functioning within the marriage, it should surprise no one that Byron would be the victim of "reexperiencing" episodes. Therefore, it should also be no surprise, that when away from the traumatic stimuli, his mood improved. Consider the following anecdotes:

One reason for Byron's irascibility during his marriage, as he later told Lady Blessington, was that he was constantly bothered by money difficulties.²⁴⁹

When Byron and Annabella paid their first visit (since the marriage) to Augusta, at Six Mile Bottom, (which was bound to bring back remembrances of his illicit relationship with her), he was having great financial difficulties as well:

Byron was in a state of great perturbation ... Annabella was frightened when he came to bed at last and swore at his valet Fletcher while undressing, and once when some movement in her sleep had brought her nearer to him, he woke her with the cry, 'Don't touch me!'

Annabella did not make allowance for the fact that Byron was drunk on these occasions.²⁵⁰

It is especially important to note that "Byron's mood did change as soon as they reached London," and that:

Byron was soon back in the swing of his old London life going to Murray's in the morning for a conference or a chat with the literary group gathered there, attending the theater, and calling on Douglas Kinnaird and even on Lady Melbourne. Annabella did not share much in this life, and she was uneasy.²⁵¹

Marchand points out that when Byron was with his friends, he was, for the most part, happy: "When Scott returned from France in June and lunched with Byron and the comedian Matthew, he found the poet 'full of fun, frolic, wit, and whim: he was as playful as a kitten.'"²⁵² When money problems hit, Byron began to experience his next black mood:

By the end of August Byron's nerves and temper were frayed. It was exasperating for a man with a penchant for generous prodigality to be constantly hounded by the threat of executions and to have no money in sight.²⁵³

To escape his financial trauma, Byron went to visit his sister, leaving his pregnant wife with the financial worries. Guilt, on leaving Annabella with the financial worries, "made him 'perfectly ferocious' to her four days before his departure.... In the weeks that followed Byron's spirits went up and down, his alternating kindness, pity, and exasperated harshness to his wife making his conduct unpredictable."²⁵⁴ Again, if the stimulus is overlooked, this could be presumed to be signs of bipolar behavior. Eventually, his financial situation made him the victim of sleepless nights. It was this situation that prompted him

to declare, "it is my destiny to ruin all I come near."²⁵⁵

Marchand frequently mentions that a contributing factor to Byron's emotional outbursts was his heavy drinking. As a result of this, "his rages became so terrifying that [Augusta and Annabella] took refuge in the belief that he was suffering from temporary insanity."²⁵⁶

The fact that Byron's worst rages occurred while under the influence of alcohol, has a heavy bearing on his diagnosis. A closer look at the most plausible DSM-IV categories, will clarify this. Because other researchers deemed Byron to be Bipolar, I looked first at the Bipolar Disorders. (It was necessary to look at several, as those researchers did not specify which of the Bipolar Disorders they felt he was a victim of.)

I examined the following categories: Major Depressive Episode, Manic Episode, and Mixed Episode. After acquainting myself with the particulars of each, it soon became evident, for a very singular reason, that Byron's behavior did not meet the diagnostic criterion for the Bipolar Disorders. The alcohol he consumed so freely during the height of his rages, would preclude him from being diagnosed Bipolar. According to Differential Diagnostic exclusionary data, used for establishing boundaries between diagnoses, a Substance-Induced Mood Disorder is distinguished from a Manic Episode, Depressive Episode, or Mixed Episode by the fact that a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication,

or a toxin) is judged to be etiologically related to the mood disturbance. The same criteria pertain to all the Bipolar Disorders.

Because Byron's drug of choice was alcohol, he could be considered a candidate for Alcohol-Intoxication, which meets the same DSM-IV criteria for Substance Intoxication, which is as follows:

The essential feature of Substance Intoxication is the development of a reversible substance-specific syndrome due to the recent ingestion of (or exposure to) a substance (Criterion A). The clinically significant maladaptive behavioral or psychological changes associated with intoxication (e.g., belligerence, mood lability, cognitive impairment, impaired judgment, impaired social or occupational functioning) are due to the direct physiological effects of the substance on the central nervous system and develop during or shortly after use of the substance (Criterion B).²⁵⁷

Due to of the lack of inhibitions induced by the alcohol, it is reasonable to presume that Byron's response would have been extremely violent, as the substance would have undoubtedly released the full destructive power of his Posttraumatic wrath. This, I believe, is what frightened Annabella and Augusta so terribly.

That the alcohol exacerbated his symptoms is fairly apparent. Consider his behaviors under these varying circumstances. "When Annabella would not consent to his going alone [to London], he flew into a rage. Apparently he calmed down, however, and acquiesced in her desire to accom-

pany him.²⁵⁸ Not under the influence, he managed to eventually control his rage, and Annabella was not fearful of expressing her desires. The night he was drunk, and yelled "don't touch me," (when during sleep she accidentally touched him), she was very frightened. During the period when Annabella and Augusta thought he'd gone insane, and both had to take refuge (previously mentioned) he had also been drinking.

The chances are excellent that Byron's rages were a matter of degree, the drunken variety being ever more frightening than the garden variety. Marchand confirms for us the effect alcohol had on his erratic lordship:

Byron was not fully aware of the cumulative impression his conduct under continued irritations, drinking, and loss of temper must have made on his sensitive wife. In one fit of vexation and rage he dashed to pieces on the hearth a watch he had carried since boyhood and had taken to Greece with him. He drank to forget, and that made him more uninhibited in his speech ... heavy drinking contributed to his irrational behavior."²⁵⁹

Public information data from the American Psychiatric Association states that "relationships are often a trouble spot for people with PTSD. They often resolve conflicts by withdrawing emotionally or even by becoming physically violent."²⁶⁰ That Byron became violent, has been made evident throughout this paper. That he had relationship problems is also apparent—but the very worst of those problems

were with women. (Perhaps Annabella and Augusta took refuge because they feared getting the same treatment as Byron's watch.)

So far, Byron has managed to display at least some aspect of every descriptor for recurrent behavior patterns. The fifth, and last, of the recurrent behaviors concerns "physiological reactivity on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event."²⁶¹ This would be a very difficult symptom to prove, as the latest research on physiological responses requires that the client be wired with electrodes, the information from which is fed into computers. I did not attempt this, for obvious reasons.

CRITERION C

Where the next set of criteria is concerned, Byron, once again, has no trouble qualifying. Criterion C deals with the following avoidant behaviors:

Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma), as indicated by three (or more) of the following:

- (1) efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma
- (2) efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma
- (3) inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma

(4) markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities

(5) feeling of detachment or estrangement from others

(6) restricted range of affect (e.g., unable to have loving feelings)

(7) sense of a foreshortened future (e.g., does not expect to have a career, marriage, children, or a normal life span)²⁶²

There is little doubt that Byron displayed the avoidant behaviors described in items one and two. This is so, because his attempts at avoidance were flagrant. While a student at Harrow, he wrote to Hanson, his mother's attorney asking his assistance to help him avoid his mother:

I have written to tell her that my Holidays commence on the 6th of August, but however, July the 31st is the proper day.—I beg that if you cannot find some means to keep her in the Country that you at least will connive at this deception which I can palliate, and then I shall be down in the country before she knows where I am ... if that is impossible, do not mention anything about the day our Holidays commence, of which you can be easily supposed not to be informed: if, I repeat, you can by any means prevent this Mother from executing her purposes, believe me, you will greatly oblige.²⁶³

In a letter to his sister Augusta, he continues his avoidance tirade:

The sweets of her society I have already drunk to the last dregs, I hope we shall meet on more affectionate Terms, or meet no more. But why do I say meet? her temper precludes every idea of happiness, and therefore in future I

shall avoid her hospitable mansion....²⁶⁴

To his friend, John Pigot, whose home was often a shelter when Mrs. Byron was on the warpath, he wrote:

My lodgings must be kept secret from Mrs. B. You may present my compliments to her, and say any attempt to pursue me will fail, as I have taken measures to retreat immediately to Portsmouth, on first intimation of her removal from Southwell.²⁶⁵

Once again, he makes Augusta the recipient of his feelings for his mother:

I am living here alone, which suits my inclinations better than society of any kind. Mrs. Byron I have shaken off for two years, and I shall not resume her yoke in future, I am afraid my disposition will suffer in your estimation; but I never can forgive that woman, or breathe in comfort under the same roof.²⁶⁶

Byron also showed avoidant behavior toward Lord Grey, the young man who is believed to have sexually assaulted him. This quote was mentioned earlier, but necessarily repeated here to make a point:

I am as you imagine a little dull here; not being on terms of intimacy with Lord Grey I avoid Newstead.... I am not reconciled to Lord Grey, and I never will. He was once my greatest friend, my reasons for ceasing that Friendship are such as I cannot explain, not even to you, my Dear Sister (although were they to be made known to any body, you would be the first), but they will ever remain hidden in my own breast.... They are Good ones, however, for although I am violent I am not capricious in my attachments.²⁶⁷

Although Byron's mother begged him to explain to her his reasons for his avoidance of Lord Grey, and begged him further to renew his friendship, he stated adamantly:

[This] I will never do....He called once during my last vacation, she threatened, stormed, begged, me to make it up, he himself loved me and wished it, but my reason was so excellent that neither had effect, nor would I speak or stay in the same room, 'till he took his departure. No doubt this appears odd but was my reason known, which it never will be if I can help it, I should be justified in my conduct. Now if I am to be tormented with her and him in this style I cannot submit to it.²⁶⁸

Item three, in Criterion C, is a behavior that I saw no evidence of in Byron—an inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma. Perhaps he would have been better off had he forgotten some things, rather than remembering every minute detail of his abusive childhood. It seems, the inability to forget worked against him.

Criterion C, item four, states that the PTSD victim "displays a markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities."²⁶⁹ It was typical of Byron to tire of society, and life as he knew it. On many occasions, he experienced an ennui that drove him to the desire to do away with all remembrances of his day to day world:

He often spoke of selling Newstead and going to settle on the Isle of Naxos; he would adopt the costume and the customs of the Orient, and spend his life in studying Eastern poetry. The chill of the English winter depressed him, and the spiritual atmosphere of the country

did likewise.²⁷⁰

As always, if Byron experienced it, he wrote about it. His feelings of ennui showed up in Childe Harold: "...grown aged in this world of woe, In deeds, not years, piercing the depths of life, So that no wonder waits him"²⁷¹

Byron wasted no words in stating how being alone compared to hobnobbing with society—even the society of his ladylove (whomever that might be). Consider the following comment:

I do not know that I am happiest when alone; but this I am sure of, that I never am long in the society even of her I love (God knows too well, and the devil probably too) without a yearning for the company of my lamp and my utterly confused and tumbled-over library. Even in the day, I send away my carriage oftener than I use or abuse it. *Per esempio*—I have not stirred out of these rooms for these four days past²⁷²

Unfortunately, Byron's diminished interest in life turned inward, unless he found a way to keep himself occupied. He tells us that "I must set about some employment soon; my heart begins to eat itself again."²⁷³

Talk about diminished interest in significant activities, Byron even expressed diminished interest in life itself—and most certainly an afterlife. To Mr. Hodgson he wrote:

I will have nothing to do with your immortality; we are miserable enough in this life, without the absurdity of speculating upon another. If men are to live, why die at all? and if they die,

why disturb the sweet and sound sleep
that 'knows no waking?'²⁷⁴

In Greece, while recovering from a serious illness, Byron's diminished interest in life became almost a death wish. Age had much to do with it; he had lost the delicate beauty that had won the hearts of so many admirers:

That Grecian beauty of the pale face
that had been irresistible to men and
women alike had now ceased to attract.
His graying hair was growing thin, his
teeth were loose, his face had returned
to a flabby plumpness.²⁷⁵

In this aged and depressed condition, the final rebuff came when his young Greek page, Loukas (to whom he was emotionally attached), expressed an indifference toward him. "It was a sad and disillusioning experience to find that the boy on whom he had lavished expensive gifts did not respond with either affection or gratitude."²⁷⁶

"On the eve of his thirty-sixth birthday, he turned to tortured verse for the frankest expression of his inner feelings."²⁷⁷ As was his way, he poured out his pain onto paper:

'Tis time this heart should be unmoved,
Since others it has ceased to move:
Yet, though I cannot be loved,
Still let me love!

My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers and the fruits of Love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone!

The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some Volcanic isle;
No torch is kindled at its blaze-

A funeral pile.

The hope, the fear, the jealous care,
The exalted portion of the pain
And power of love, I cannot share,
But wear this chain.

Tread those reviving passions down,
Unworthy manhood!—unto thee
Indifferent should the smile or frown
Of beauty be.

If thou regret'st thy youth, why live?
The land of honourable death
Is here:—up to the Field, and give
Away thy breath!

Seek out—less often sought than found—
A soldier's grave, for thee best;
Then look around, and choose thy ground,
And take thy rest.²⁷⁸

While in Greece, Byron's physical and mental condition was such that his physician, Dr. Milligan suggested that "a total reform of his mode of living might restore his vigor."²⁷⁹ He impatiently responded:

Do you suppose that I wish for life? I
have grown heartily sick of it, and
shall welcome the hour I depart from
it.... But the apprehension of two
things now haunt my mind. I picture
myself slowly expiring on a bed of
torture, or terminating my days like
Swift—a grinning idiot.²⁸⁰

With such feelings of diminished interest in life, how could Byron not experience feelings of detachment and estrangement from others? It is these avoidant qualities that comprise the elements of Criterion C, item five. Very closely related to item five, is item six, which involves restricted range of affect, the inability to have loving

feelings—for if one is emotionally detached from other, how can one have loving feelings?

Data on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, from The American Psychiatric Association, states that: "People who suffer from [PTSD] frequently say they can't feel emotions, especially toward those to whom they are closest."²⁸¹ This lack of sensation is often described as feelings of emotional numbness.

Byron expressed this lack of sensation in terms of feeling alone in the world. It makes sense, that Byron's loveless feelings of estrangement would have been directly related to his warped attachment during infancy—he never learned to feel that deep bond with his mother, and hence, he could not experience it with others. I believe his attachments to his male friends were more closely related to true attachments, but even those were not completely fulfilling to him.

In fact, Byron made it quite clear, that the true purpose of life was to try to feel that we exist. Imagine the emotional perspective behind such a statement. In a letter to Annabella (before their marriage), Byron expressed this opinion:

The object of life is sensation—to feel that we exist, even though in pain. It is this 'craving void' which drives us to gaming—to battle—to travel—to intemperate, but keenly felt pursuits of any description, whose principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from their

accomplishment.²⁸²

Perhaps the real reason he went to Greece was not just to do battle with the Turks, but he had hopes that as a participant he might fill that void with deep feelings—any kind of deep feelings—which to him had been so far unattainable, except for (perhaps) brief moments.

Byron once told Moore that "agitation of any kind always gives 'a rebound' to his spirits."²⁸³ In other words, agitation allowed him to "feel something". Byron seemed to be caught in a loop; he would reach out for the love to be found in friendships, and when that could not satisfy his emotional needs (as nothing could), he would again withdraw. In the following example, his good friend Hobhouse had invited him to dinner, which he had at least found pleasurable on many occasions, but on this occasion, the old ennui is back:

Here I am, alone, instead of dining at Lord H.'s where I was asked,—but not inclined to go any where. Hobhouse says I am growing a loup garou,—a solitary hobgoblin. True;—'I am myself alone'. The last week has been passed in reading ... If I could always read, I should never feel the want of society. Do I regret it?—um!—'Man delights not me', and only one woman—at a time.²⁸⁴

Even on the most important of occasions, Byron was alone. For instance, on the day he was to take his seat in the House of Lords, an event during which customarily young peers are attended by a relative or friend. He had no one,

which made him "cruelly aware of how solitary he was in the world."²⁸⁵ His natural leanings were toward solitude; experiences such as the previous, left him, even more removed from his fellow man. Although he enjoyed dining with his friends, he sometimes seemed less sociable, and was viewed with less favour. A sparing eater, he left the table before the others, and kept himself aloof, gazing at the sea... where he stayed for hours.... His fellow-passengers mistook his craving for solitude for mere scornfulness, and judging him harshly, noted the downward glance of his eyes, the perturbed defiance of his mien."²⁸⁶

Byron, at one time in his life, had traveled with his friend Hobhouse for a year. He reached a point where even traveling had ceased to arouse his better passions, and for him, the parting with his friend was a welcome change. To his mother (whom he did write on occasion) he wrote:

I am very glad to be once more alone,
for I was sick of my companion,—not
that he was a bad one, but because my
nature leads me to solitude, and that
every day adds to this disposition.²⁸⁷

And in a letter to his friend, Henry Drury, he gives further evidence of his state of mind. He appears heartily depressed—but a depression not induced by family genetics, rather by an inability to make truly intimate emotional connections with the inhabitants who share his world. Byron's restricted range of affect has literally caused his downfall:

I was sick of my own country, and not much prepossessed in favour of any other; but I 'drag on like a chain' without 'lengthening it at each remove.' I am like the Jolly Miller, caring for nobody, and not cared for.²⁸⁸

On returning to Newstead, from his first voyage, he wrote to his mother:

I don't suppose I shall be much pestered with visitors [sic]; but if I am, you must receive them, for I am determined to have nobody breaking in on my retirement: you know that I never was fond of society, and I am less so than before.²⁸⁹

Maurois summed up perfectly the psychological machinery that caused Byron to reach out for someone to attach to, and just as quickly detach himself, and go off on his solitary rambles:

Those who have suffered, and whose sufferings are healed by habit or forgetfulness, have a prodigious aptitude for ennui, because pain, while making our life intolerable, fills it at the same time with sentiments of such strength that they conceal its real emptiness He believed himself ready to pursue any violent passion, even a lawless one, provided that it gave him that ever-fleeting sense of his own existence.²⁹⁰

I think it would be difficult to be more detached from society than Byron was. Perhaps we should be asking why he was as well as he was. I believe, under the same circumstances, most people would be less successful.

The next criterion is most unusual, and whether or not Byron meets the descriptors is questionable. Item seven specifies that the person experiences a sense of foreshort-

ened future (e.g., does not expect to have a career, marriage, children, or a normal life span). The psychological term for this is "omen formation." And in general, it found mainly in children or young people. (Although not young at the time, Byron frequently stated that he would die in Greece. This may have been more of a death wish.). He was in fact a terribly superstitious person, and had been from a very early age.

Byron was a firm believer in predestination; he truly imagined himself as being an integral part of the long line of his doomed, evil ancestors. The deep feelings of connectedness Byron felt with these ancestors could easily have functioned as a self-fulfilling prophecy in his life. "From them, he was firmly convinced—from his grandfather, the gallant but unlucky admiral, and from his disreputable grand-uncle, 'the Wicked Lord'—he had received a legacy of strife, restlessness and bitter feeling."²⁹¹

I do not really believe Byron's superstitions to be a form of omen formation; rather, they probably functioned as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Nonetheless, I will present the ones that he was most noted for. Byron was a fatalist:

'Like Sylla,' he wrote in *Detached Thoughts*, the journal of miscellaneous reflections he compiled in 1821, 'I have always believed that all things depended upon Fortune, and nothing upon ourselves. I am not aware of any one thought or action worthy of being called good to myself or others, which is not to be attributed to the Good Goddess,

Fortune.'²⁹²

However, "Byron's Pagan fatalism had a Christian coloring. Brought up by a Calvinistic nurse, he never quite shook off the dogma of predestination in which he had been educated; and to these ideas a strain of private superstition gave added picturesquenesss."²⁹³

As a result of this thinking, "...all the Byrons he was convinced, were doomed—the 'Wicked Lord,' 'Foul Weather Jack'...and himself, offspring of a handsome, dissolute father and a foolish, ill-educated, violent-tempered mother. To those whom he loved, Byron sometimes asserted his love was always fatal."²⁹⁴

This fatalist belief touched every moment of his life; he truly felt he was the recipient of the legacy of his evil ancestors, and that he was doomed to be like them. Certainly, this added to the hopelessness he felt on so many occasions.

CRITERION D

Byron may have scored low on the omen scale, but Criterion D is most certainly in alignment with his behaviors. Item one states that the person has difficulty falling or staying asleep. Byron's sleep problems were mentioned earlier, but since there is a great store of information on them, I will add a few more items. This information, taken from his journal, provides a fine record of his every thought and activity:

I awoke from a dream!—well! and have

not others dreamed? Such a dream!—but she did not overtake me. I wish the dead would rest, however. Ugh! how my blood chilled,—and I could not wake—and—and—heigho! I do not like this dream,—I hate its 'foregone conclusion'. [sic] And am I to be shaken by shadows?

Went to bed, and slept dreamlessly, but not refreshingly. Went to Waite's ...he says that I grind [my teeth] in my sleep and chip the edges. That same sleep is no friend of mine, though I court him sometimes for half the twenty-four.²⁹⁵

Irritability and outbursts of anger are the criteria for item two. Since the major focus of this paper deals with Byron's irritability and rage, we know that he has more than met the guidelines of this particular item. Therefore, I will move on to item three: difficulty in concentrating. Although there is little direct evidence of this, I would think that irritability and rage would not be conducive to clear thought. It seems entirely obvious that Byron possessed little ability to direct his life in a practical way; his was a life of whim and failed attempts to fulfill indefinable emotional needs. Much of Byron's existence consisted of behaviors that were not well thought out—possibly due to some kind of interference in his ability to concentrate.

The next two sets of criteria I have grouped together. Items four and five deal with hypervigilance, and exaggerated startle response. The Harvard Mental Health Letter defines the behavior involved in these two criteria:

People with PTSD are jumpy and guarded because they are permanently on alert for an emergency that no longer exists. They over-react to anything associated with the traumatic event because of a conditioned response that resembles a phobia. The Vietnam veteran becomes afraid of all Asians; the woman raped in an elevator begins to sweat and breathe fast whenever she enters one. Even a normal physical change like the increase in heart rate during exercise may provoke fear. Avoidance follows naturally. Some people retreat from more and more places, situations, activities, persons, and feelings as they become associated with stimuli associated with the trauma—a process that behavioral psychologists call generalization.

The bodies and minds of trauma victims are demanding both vigilance and repose so intensely that they cannot make normal adaptive compromises between these conflicting needs.²⁹⁶

The Mental Health Newsletter goes on to explain the relationship between hypervigilance, startle reaction, and the avoidance behaviors found in Criterion C:

[Because of the conflicting needs, victims] numb themselves to keep the trauma out of consciousness, but it repeatedly breaks through. They become either hypersensitive or insensitive to the environment, responding too intensely or not at all. [This could account for Byron's extremes in behavior, sometimes overly sensitive, sometimes cold and insensitive.] At the same time they are discovering that, beginning with the traumatic event itself, more and more things will not bear thinking about.

That makes it still more difficult for them to modulate their responses. They deny any feelings while succumbing to physical symptoms or an almost reflexive urge to action.²⁹⁷

In this criterion, we find an explanation for the paradoxical behaviors that were the physical manifestations of all Byron's emotional pain. His mother's abuse, which began at so young an age, would have required that he learn to be hypervigilant—in other words, being ever aware of what not to do to avoid setting her off, or at least to know when to run. The startle response was quite apparent in his relationship with his wife.

He found himself involved with female who could not only spot his weaknesses, but would clarify them for him. He had to alter his lifestyle in many ways to suit her needs, to try to keep her happy—put them altogether, they spell "mother." His wife's "mother-like" behavior triggered the same violent response he learned to use on his mother, a form of self-defense. When his beloved sister sided with Annabella, his behavior generalized, and she too received the same treatment. The dynamics of that situation set off the startle response, which snowballed into a full blown Posttraumatic episode. The responses to the abusive treatment Byron received during childhood lived inside him his entire life, always ready to manifest themselves at the "learned" signals.

THE FINAL INDIGNATION

The weight of Byron's emotional baggage must have been cumbersome. The combination of his mother's abuse, his father's neglect, the painful memories of sexual abuse and

beatings at the hands of May Gray, and whatever sexual contact occurred between him and Lord Grey must have eaten constantly at his mind. The last of the indignities imposed upon Byron—the lameness he had to bear, "caused him much bodily suffering and mental agony, and that probably did more to shape his character than it will ever be possible to calculate."²⁹⁸ Byron's lameness was a constant cause of embarrassment, physical suffering, and emotional distress. His early experiences left him keenly attuned (hyper-vigilant) to any imagined or real insults related to his lameness. It contributed greatly to his intense trauma, and resultant responses. When a young child, the "townsfolk called him 'Mrs. Byron's crookit de'il.'"²⁹⁹ Leigh Hunt, friend of Byron's, (speaking of his lameness), said, "the usual thoughtlessness of schoolboys made him feel it bitterly at Harrow. He would wake and find his leg in a tub of water."³⁰⁰

The psychological effect the lame foot had on Byron is made painfully clear in the following account. Byron was conversing one day with his friend Rev. John Becher, the Southwell clergyman:

Becher strove to convince Byron that the Providence against which he grumbled had dowered him with a rich diversity of boons—with a rank, wit, a fortune... and above all with "a mind which place him above the rest of mankind.

'Ah! my dear friend,' said Byron mournfully, placing a finger on his brow, 'if

this places me above mankind, that'—and he pointed at his foot—'places me far, far below them.'³⁰¹

Byron's "morbid sensitiveness to his lameness had not subsided with age and maturity, and it added to his touchiness."³⁰² Byron did not speak easily or freely about his lameness. The following quote describes an incidence that occurred in 1823, when he (on a very rare occasion) discussed his foot openly with a Dr. Alexander:

'That foot has been the bane of my life.' And he confessed that he had once gone to London, probably while he was at Harrow to have it amputated, but the doctor would not perform the operation. Dr. Alexander observed his deep-seated dissatisfaction with his life.³⁰³

Departing momentarily from the DSM-IV descriptors, I believe it is important to note that the behaviors exhibited by Byron, as a result of his abusive childhood, are very typical of abused children, and in alignment with the behavior descriptors in The Child Abuse Prevention Handbook, from the California Department of Justice. The implication here is that the *guidelines do not change when diagnosing across generations*. The handbook lists the following behaviors among their behavioral indicators of physical abuse:

- Child is excessively passive, overly compliant, apathetic, withdrawn or fearful, or at the other extreme, excessively aggressive, destructive or physically violent.
- Child is frightened of going home.
- Child exhibits drastic behavior

changes in and out of parental/caretaker presence.

- Adolescent exhibits depression, self-mutilation, suicide attempts, substance abuse, or sleep and eating disorders.³⁰⁴

These descriptors are in complete agreement with those of the Harvard Mental Health Letter, the information from which is based on the DSM-IV. Byron was no stranger to any of them. His aggressive, destructive behavior has been evidenced throughout this paper. We know that he hated going home to his mother, and that his behavior changed drastically when not in her presence. We can only wonder if his final adventure in Greece was a form of suicide, but we know for a fact that he had sleep disorders, and information I have gathered indicates he had a serious eating disorder.

Byron was troubled by weight problems since he was a boy. As he grew older, his manner of dealing with them sounds very like Anorexia Nervosa. Consider the following quotes: "In 1822, Medwin noted: "He has almost discontinued his rides on horseback, and has starved himself into an unnatural thinness," and, to maintain his stamina, "he drank a pint of gin every night and indulged more freely than usual in wine."³⁰⁵ The following account occurred in 1823:

Dr. Millingen was dubious about Byron's abstemious diet, which the poet said was intended to increase his mental powers, but which the doctor saw was motivated by a fear of corpulence. He not only avoided nourishing food, but 'had recourse almost daily to strong drastic pills, of which extract of colocynth,

gamboge, scammony, &c.[sic] were the chief ingredients; and if he observed the slightest increase in the size of his wrists or waist...he immediately sought to reduce it by taking a large dose of Epsom salts....³⁰⁶ At one point in his life Byron dieted on vinegar and water, to maintain his thin physique.

That Byron had an eating disorder, is not at all surprising. A closer look at the PTSD Associated Features and Disorders, in the DSM-IV, indicates that Byron (as a result of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder) was at an increased risk of developing Major Depressive Disorder (among other maladies). This in turn, put him at increased risk of developing Anorexia Nervosa, or Bulimia. This would account not only for the melancholy, but the eating disorder as well.³⁰⁷

CRITERIA E AND F

We have come to the last of the diagnostic criteria for PTSD, Criteria E and F. The first requires that the symptoms in B, C, and D be present for longer than one month. The latter requires that the disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.³⁰⁸ Byron had no difficulty meeting these criteria. The data presented in this paper clearly demonstrates that his life was a collection of behaviors prompted by social and emotional distress.

Maybe we cannot know beyond that shadow of a doubt whether Byron actually suffered from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, but given his background and symptoms, I believe

that a diagnosis of PTSD makes much more sense than concluding he was Bipolar. Interestingly enough, support for this hypothesis comes from Byron himself, who, because of his own harsh upbringing, made it a point to be aware of the causes and outcomes of such treatment. On August 10, 1823, Byron expressed the following opinions to Dr. James Kennedy, who recorded it in his journal:

He said one of the greatest difficulties which he had met with, and which he could not overcome, was the existence of so much pure and unmixed evil in the world, as he had witnessed; and which he could not reconcile to the idea of a benevolent Creator. He added, that wherever he had been, he had found vice and misery predominant, and that real happiness and virtue were rarely, if ever, to be seen. He had made it, he said, his business to converse with, and inquire into, the history of many wretched and deformed creatures with whom he had met, and he generally found their history a record of unvarying misery from their very birth.... 'Wherever there is a defect of happiness, there is a defect of duty and benevolence, not on the part of the Creator, but on that of man.'³⁰⁹

This sounds very much like some of the comments he made about his own mother, to his sister Augusta. He truly believed she did not deserve to be called mother, because she had not fulfilled her duties as one. While reflecting again on his own life, Byron came to this conclusion:

The latter part of my life has been a perpetual struggle against affections which embittered the earliest portion; and though I flatter myself I have in great measure conquered them, yet there

are moments when I am as foolish as formerly. I never said this much before, nor had I said this now, if I did not suspect myself of having been rather savage, and wish to inform you this much of the cause.³¹⁰

In assessing his own life, his very personal internal combustion, and the effect of his outward explosions on the world around him, he cathartically puts into poetry the feelings he shared with Dr. Kennedy"

But let this pass—I'll whine no more,
Nor seek again an eastern shore;
The world befits a busy brain—
I'll hie me to its haunts again,
But if, in some succeeding year,
When Britain's May is in the sere,
Thou hear'st of one whose deepening crimes
Suit with the sablest of the times,
Of one, whom love nor pity sways,
Nor hope of fame, nor good men's praise,
One, who in stern ambition's pride,
Perchance not blood shall turn aside;
One rank'd in some recording page
With the worst anarchists of the age
Him wilt thou know—and knowing pause,
Nor with the effect forget the cause.³¹¹

Maurois showed tremendous psychological insight, as is witnessed in his comments on Byron's self-revelment:

For years he had been striving to slay a Sentimentalist within himself who had pained him to excess. He was far too courageous to settle down to the role of dolorous gentleman, but imagining that he had lost all trust in womankind as in mankind, he was trying to live like a Corsair of pleasure, without love and without friendship. The disaster was, that with these stifled passions, he grew bored to breaking-point.³¹²

Byron felt he was "to a great measure"³¹³ successful, in overcoming his embittered past. I can't help wondering,

under the same circumstances, who of us would have done as well? While researching Byron's tortured existence, I decided it might be a good idea to look at those personality factors and experiences that kept him from experiencing the outright "back ward" variety of insanity. A couple of factors stood out.

IT COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE

I have identified exactly two factors that allowed Lord Byron to remain as sane as he was: His writing (letters, poems, and journals), and his sense of humour. Both were cathartic. His sense of humor ranged from high level satirical wit, to the lowest of puns, and, his ability to be just plain silly must have provided some kind of emotional release. The names he invented for his mother are a prime example of that satirical wit. (I would like to note that Byron never called her these names directly, but made use of them in his conversations or letters.) I feel certain that this very imaginative name-calling practice provided some form of catharsis for the animosity he was harboring for his mother, who at any given time was known by one of the following names:

Mrs. B. Furiosa, the Dowager, my meek
mama, my amiable mama, my wise and good
mama, my amiable Alecto, my tormentor,
my mother the Upas Tree, that woman, my
Domestic Tyrant, [and on finally escap-
ing her grasp, he wrote,] 'I am freed
from the worse than bondage of my mater-
nal home.'³¹⁴

Humourous though these gibes at his mother might be, they are unmistakably tinged with bitterness, this is also noticeable in the following examples. Byron, in commenting on his mothers odd combination of violence and absurdity, referred to her as a "happy compound of derangement and folly."³¹⁵ He despised the way in which she shrieked her ridiculous demands at him, which, no doubt, prompted his reference to "the meek lamb-like demeanor of her ladyship."³¹⁶ When Byron went away to school, he found that his mother also displayed a talent for discharging her rage in the letters she wrote, which he referred to as the "Dowager's epistles in furiosa style."³¹⁷

On the night of his final escape from her clutches, he mused on the convulsive anger she must have experienced, and the tempestuous scene she would have caused. Naturally, his musing ended up on paper: "Her soft warblings must have delighted her auditors, her higher Notes being particularly musical, and on a calm moonlight Evening, would be heard to great Advantage."³¹⁸ He brought his musing to a close, with equal wit:

Oh! for the pen of Ariosto to rehearse
in Epic the scolding of that momentous
Eve, or rather let me invoke the Shade
of Dantè to inspire me, for none but the
author of the "Inferno" could properly
preside over such an Attempt."³¹⁹

Therapeutic though his sense of humour was, the catharsis he experienced through his intensely personal writing

most likely provided him with the most relief. Whether pouring out his anguish and rage into the letters he wrote to his sister (wherein Augusta took on the role of a psychoanalyst), or his Freudian transferring of his moods, thoughts and deeds, to his poetic characters—he was looking for "freedom from the strongest passions."³²⁰ Giving credit where credit is due, Freud is sometimes right. Byron literally provided his own psychoanalytic therapy through the medium of print:

Most of what Byron wrote henceforth grew directly or indirectly out of his personal need for emotional release, and through practice of this 'inferior art he became adept in voicing the pangs not only of himself but of his generation.... He succumbed to the poetry of self-expression as other men might to drugs or drink.

While composing the *Bride of Abydos* he wrote Lady Melbourne: '... my mind has been from late and later events in such a state of fermentation, that as usual I have been obliged to empty it in rhyme, and am in the very heart of another Eastern tale.'³²¹

Had Byron been born in another time or place, he most likely would not have possessed the means to achieve his catharsis; but one of the "concept[s] that guided Byron's literary performance was the subjective Romantic one born of the impulse to 'look in your heart and write.' He adopted it perforce, impelled by both temperament and his environment..."³²² Marchand provides support for this hypothesis: "The fact was that he had found a genre which satisfied his

deepest feelings about the moral function of poetry and at the same time allowed the complete cathartic escape for his feelings, whether serious or comic."³²³

And all of those feelings and moods were his. Herein lies the problem of assessing both his personality and his poetry:

Fidelity to the mood of the moment was Byron's forte, and failure to acknowledge this has befuddled Byron criticism from the time the poems were published until the present day. There has been a persistent refusal to accept Byron's own frankest statements, and to recognize that honesty and self-honesty were almost an obsession with him.³²⁴

In Manfred, and Childe Harold, cantos three and four, Byron expressed his darker moods. He was Childe Harold,

A gloomy egoist, a Conrad (The Corsair) brooding over his 'one virtue and a thousand crimes.' He was also possessed of 'the mischievous good humor that later found expression in Beppo, [which also] offered the freest outlet for all the thoughts and feelings of his mobile personality."³²⁵

Don Juan, on the other hand, provided his greatest catharsis, and "satisfied his deepest feelings about the moral function of poetry."³²⁶

Besides the personal catharsis he experienced through his poetry and letters, Byron's journals must have allowed for an even deeper purgation, for they provided him with the opportunity to write his darkest feelings, about life in general—his nightmares and sleepless nights, even his

weight and dieting problems, as has been shown in the chapter on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. All of Byron's writing was necessarily of a deeply personal nature. He used it as a tool in an attempt to face, analyze, understand and hopefully relieve his all-consuming psychological pain.

The following information, gathered from some of his most reputable biographers (past and present), is offered as evidence of my contention. Peter Quennell has this to say:

The poet's scattered prose writings, the letters he dashed off to his friends, and the wonderful diaries and journals in which for his own amusement he composed, a partial and fragmentary, but extremely vivid self-portrait... So strong was Byron's personality that everything he produced down to the smallest and least studied notes, seems impregnated with his character.³²⁷

Quennell further states that "Byron's correspondence... does not deserve attention merely because it builds up into the portrait of an extraordinary gifted and unusually complex personality; it is also memorable because it is an intimate record of his moods and thoughts and doings."³²⁸

Where Byron's poetry is concerned, Leslie Marchand points out that:

He was in his poetry even more autobiographical than he has been supposed ... the moods, though not all the literal account of adventures of Child Harold and of Manfred, as of Beppo and Don Juan, were all his at one time or another.³²⁹

Marchand stated, "the great mistake has been not to recog-

nize that Byron was speaking in sober earnest when he wrote" the following words:

All convulsions end with me in rhyme ...
I can never get people to understand
that poetry is an expression of excited
passion, and there is no such thing as
life of passion any more than a continu-
ous earthquake, or an eternal fever.³³⁰

It is difficult to imagine what Byron's lot would have been if his innate talent had not provided him with an outlet for his volcanic emotions. His need to expell his every sensory experience in a projectile manner, and define those experiences in poetry—for himself and the world—provided a cathartic release in the strictest Freudian sense. He literally provided his own psychotherapy. Were it not for his ability to channel his deep emotional pain, through his poetry and prose, things could have been far, far worse for the poet who viewed love as "a hostile transaction."³³¹

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